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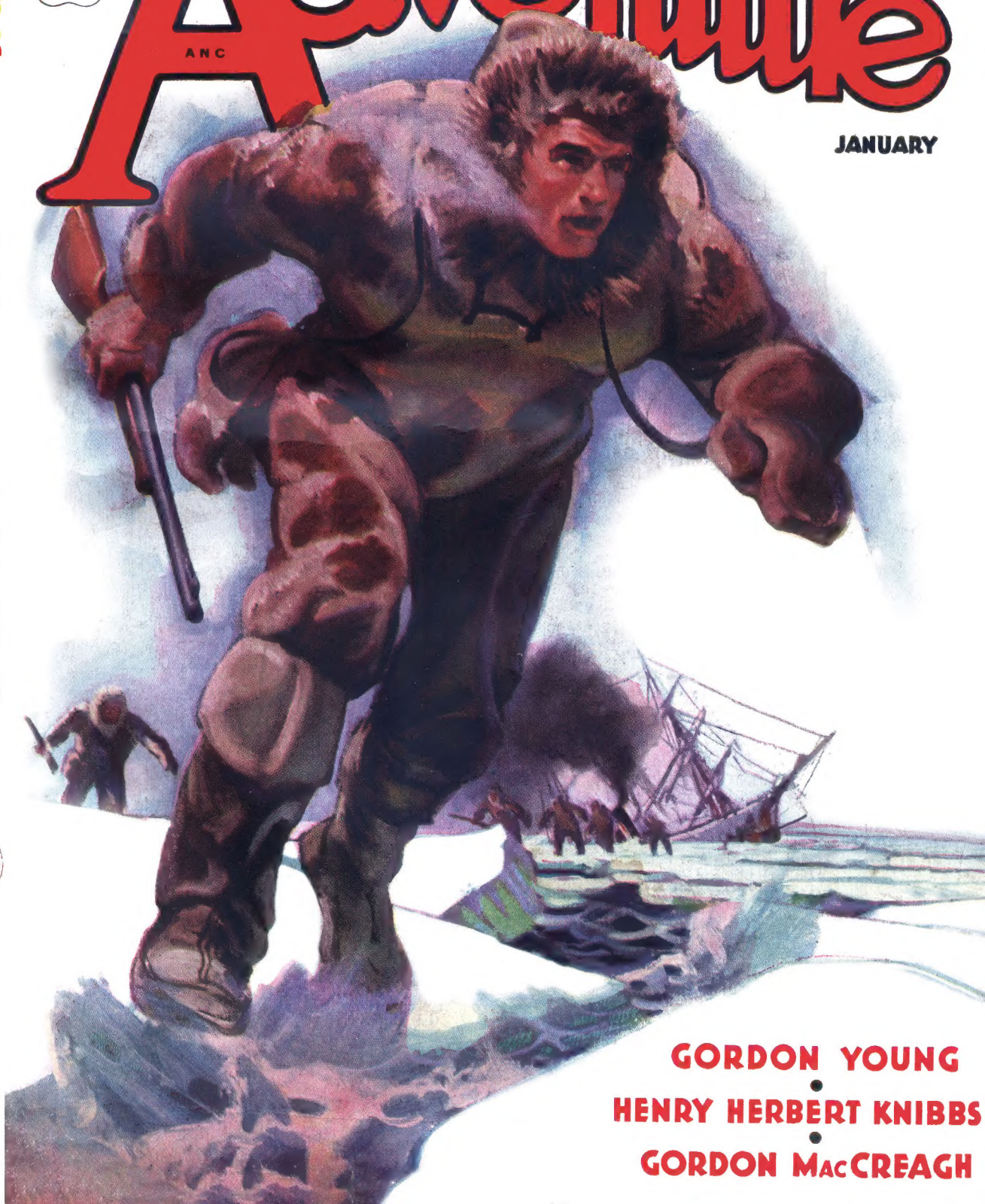

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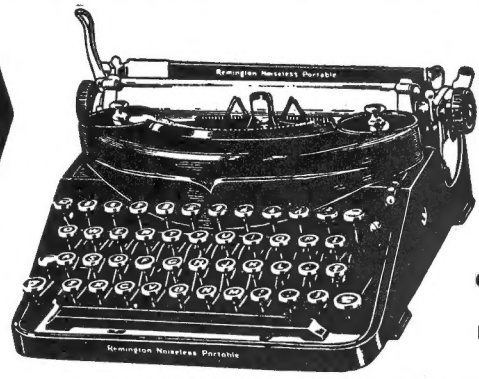

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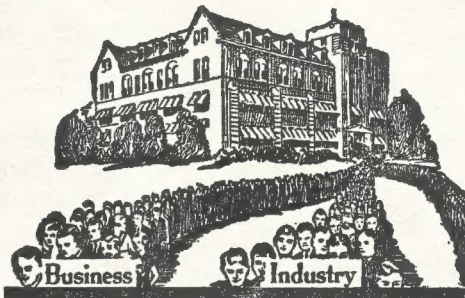

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Vol. 98, No. 3 for January, 1938 Published Once a Month

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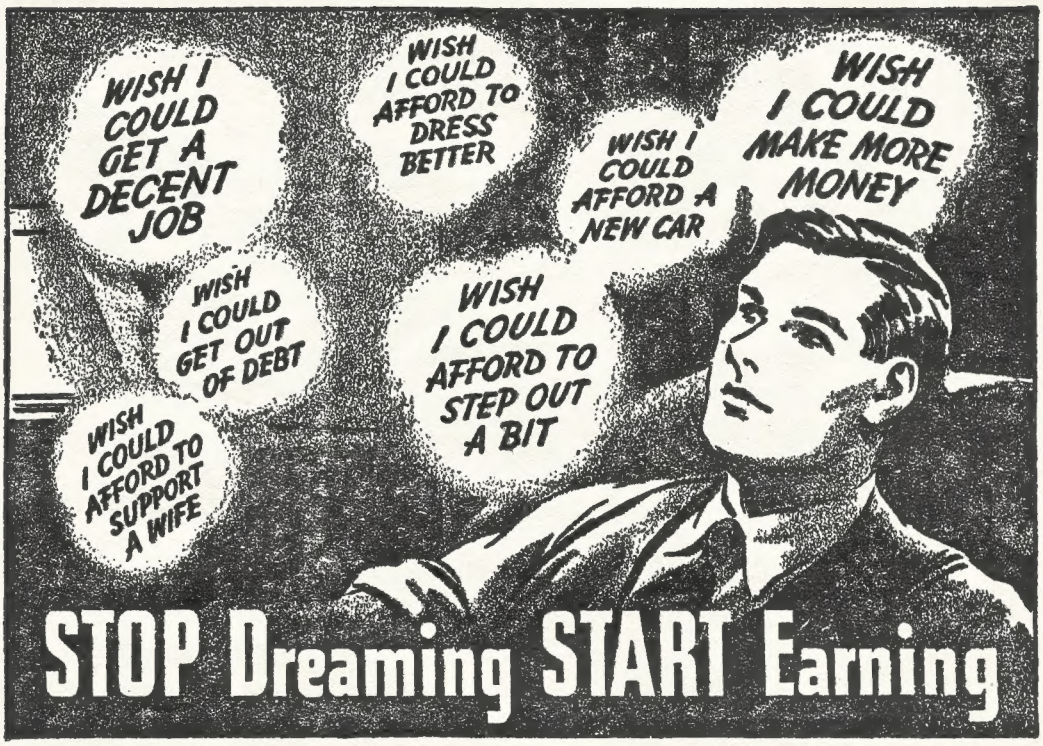
Cover by Hubert Rogers
Headings by I. B. Hazelton, Neil O'Keeffe, Amos Sewell
Howard V. L. Bloomfield, Editor

Published once a month by Popular Publications, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices, 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City Harry Steeger, President and Secretary. Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 2, 1935, at the Post Office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Yearly subscription $1.50 in advance. Single copy, 15 cents. Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. Trade Mark Registered; Copyright, 1937, by Popular Publications, Inc.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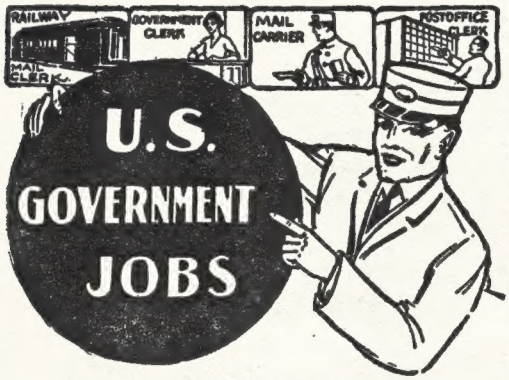

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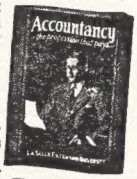

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Charles W. Cantrell, 8231 Germantown Ave., Philadelphia, wants word of Lieut. John Lewin and O'Neil Sievere.

Henry D. McGregor, 1708 Baker Avenue, Everett, Wash., wants to hear from an old shipmate, Gilford John Colvin, pharmacist's mate U.S.N. 1918-1919, later in Spokane, Wash.

Craig D. Hanson, who left Portland, Oregon, in 1935. Word wanted by G. P. Sylvester, 9535 S.E., Harold St., Portland, Oregon.

Where is Napier Mearns Crosett, his friend, J. Monte Dunstan, 51 South Beaver Street, York, Penn., queries.

Will "Sarge" Ralph Kingsley of Military Specialist Company, A.P.O. 727, write to "Kid" Collins Ewing, Odessa, Mo.

Captain Fred Ewing, Ex-Marine of Santa Domingo, please get in touch with Mrs. Sarrah Olson of 2103 N.W., Hoyt St., Portland, Oregon, or Ethel Ewing, 136-19th St., E., Holland, Michigan.

Anyone in D Company, 15th U.S. Infantry, that went to China in 1912, or anyone in the band of the 2nd Battalion, South Wales Borderers, in China 1913, 1914—write Pennock S. Bromall, 216 West 5th St., Chester, Pa.

Word wanted of Hamilton Redfield Norvell, sometimes called "Reddy" or "Curley," by his brother, Stevens Thompson Norvell, 4449 Howard Ave., Western Springs, Ill. Their father died on Dec. 30, 1936. Norvell lived in Cincinnati until 1932, went to Southern Ontario.

Otho Amos Duckwiler, formerly of Roanoke, Va., joined U.S. Army in 1914. Stationed Texas City, Texas, in 1914. Transferred to Field Artillery stationed Canal Zone 1918, 1919. His sister has died, and her daughter, Virginia Pulewich, 10 East 109 St., New York City, wants to hear from him.

Wm. P. Liebenrood, who worked on construction of Madera-Mamore Railway, last heard from at Puerto Veljo, Brazil, in 1914, believed leaving there for Cuba—please send word to G. C. Hagerman, 700 South Kingsley Drive, Los Angeles.

Mrs. Beatrice Stafford Grigsby, Box 203, Paintsville, Ky., wants word of her son, Jesse John Stafford Franklin, worked in Akron, Ohio, as John Stafford, for Goodyear Rubber Co., last heard of ten years ago.

Word wanted of Calvin William (Slim) Brown, once of Ranger, Texas. By Isaac Simmons, Bloom, Kansas.

Ralph Cornwall of Cornwell, formerly of "American Legion" in Canadian Army, transferred overseas to Intelligence service, reported caught in Germany and shot. Lately reported living in Texas or Oklahoma. Old buddy, Wayne G. Putnam, R.R. 8, Dayton, Ohio, would like word.

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The enemies were paralyzingly startled.

A DRUM FOR A WARRIOR

A novelette

By GORDON MacCREAGH

THE piranha fish in that slow eddy below the rapids swarmed so thick that they pushed each other half out of the water, mad with voracious excitement at the odors of man and grease and sweat that the current brought down to them.

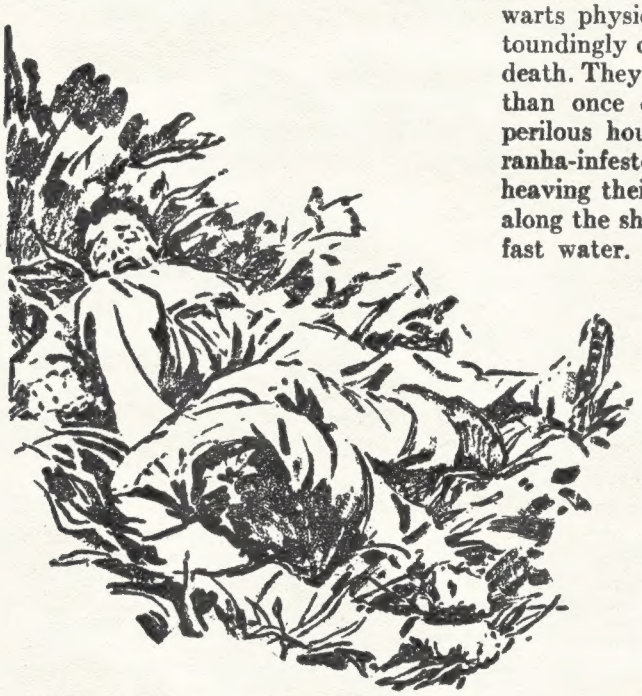
In the smother of fast water that churned into the pool—water too furious for blunt-tailed fish like piranha to negotiate—five men clung. Four naked brown men and one white man, bigger, just as naked, and tanned almost as brown. Chest deep in warm brown water that slid with the slickness of oil under their precarious finger-hold on the black volcanic boulders.

The men braced their feet grimly against the slippery bottom, heaving with their shoulders against the hull of a big war canoe that teetered on a rounded boulder over which a smooth curve of water raced. Three other naked brown men dug their toes into what crevices they could find along the shore shallows, fighting with a long rope to keep the boat's nose head-on to the stream.

One of the brown men, the sturdiest one, who shoved with his broad shoulders against the stern of the canoe, grunted a warning, all the grimmer for its simple directness.

"*Cua khe-neh! Cua kheh, homawa!* Careful now, people! Who is swept from the fast water is bones before he reaches the lower end of the pool."

He had been saying the same thing for the last three hours, working their way up that two-mile rapid. He said it for the benefit of the white man. His own men knew from their own stark experience. The white man spat brown water and floating debris from his mouth.



"That can hardly be, João. For the pool is scarce fifty yards wide; and one Dr. Wallace has shown that a piranha can bite a piece no larger than, say, a finger nail, from a floating body. Besides, no one of us is bleeding from any wound; so the fish, having no blood to attract them—"

João grunted morosely.

"Kariwa is doubtless a great witch doctor; for you white men who write in books know many things about my country that even I do not know. I am but a poor *Indio* of the Upper River. We do not know how to read. But—" He grunted again with expressive scorn—"Kariwa has not seen the piranha when their hordes shred a man's flesh from his bones."

The other brown men laughed.

The white man, shoulders and head braced stiffly against the boat's hull, turned only his eyes to cover those of the men within their range, frowning under his sun-bleached brows as though to tabulate them and put them each in a numbered niche.

Curious creatures, these black jungle Indians. Quite incongruous. Fine stalwarts physically, mentally children, astoundingly callous to matters of life and death. They had been able to laugh more than once during the preceding three perilous hours, paddling across the piranha-infested pools, shoving, hoisting, heaving their craft by sheer pulley-haul along the shore edge of that half mile of fast water.

A *batelão,* they called this boat: a white man invention, built three planks high on a native dugout canoe base. That was because, on the Upper River, a month beyond civilization, men didn't know how to lay a keel; and a three-inch thickness of dugout mahogany was a lot stronger anyhow for this business.

All of them, the boat and the river and the brown men, were why the white man was here. To study them, to note and tabulate them. To check up experience against books. David Carewe, ethnologist. To collect artifracts for glass cases in a museum and to note more data for books that only ethnologists would read. That, and to trace a vague story told by a missionary.

And David Carewe, scientist, was perhaps as incongruous himself as any of the brown men. A man of science. Yet

he was broader in the shoulder and thicker in the arm than any of the sturdy crew and he could heave twice their weight under the hull of the big *batelão*. And that, too, was one of the reasons why he was here.

"All right!" Dave shouted. "*Doetch-kha! Ugha puranga!* Let's go! A good heave now!" And—a month of close contact on a boat with any sort of men would have its effect on a man—David Carewe, ethnologist, was able to laugh, too, at the stark humors of a river that sucked at his very heels. "*Cua khe-neh.*" He repeated the leader's warning. "Careful now! Let's go!"

"*DOETCH-KHA!*" the brown men shouted and put their backs to it. The boat grated over the rock, lurched into a swift channel. The men rushed it along, twisted it into another between rocks that gnashed at them like teeth, dragged it over a shallow until exhaustion halted them.

And there it came. The slip! One of the brown men, careless for a fractional second. Dave heard the smothered yelp up at the bow of the boat, saw a brown form rasp against a jagged edge of rock, saw blood streak a fast disappearing line.

All in a flash, in that blood-chilling tick of a second in which accidents happen. In the same flash he snatched at the brown form as it swirled by. Hands caught at his. His own half hold was torn away. The beginning of other yells was in his ears as he went under.

Then he knew a sudden frightful strain on his neck. He felt his hair being torn excruciatingly from the roots while savage water dragged at his limbs, flailing straight out like a torn flag in a storm.

The flashing second of accident dragged on to a strangling aeon. Sometimes he breathed. His limbs fought the water, but they could find no purchase. He breathed more water than air. Then, when his scalp was lifting clear of his skull, his clutching hand found another. A long slow heave against relentless water guided it to solid wood. His other hand groped for the gunwale. Yells were in his ears again, the far yells of the men on the rope. His eyes opened through a haze of water. João's hand was letting go of his hair. João's broad back was braced under his body.

He clung to the gunwale and gasped. He coughed up frothy quarts of water, retched up the very floor of his belly. His breath began to come back to his heaving chest. The buzzing of his pulse in his ears began to die out. He was able to think again.

His first impulse, of course, was to thank João for having saved his life, but he didn't know just how to do it. You couldn't shake hands with a naked Indian and say, "Thanks, old man." The Indian wouldn't understand it. As a matter of fact, the Indian's language had no word for "Thank you."

Instead, David Carewe's mind turned to the first great rule that all his books of ethnology had taught him! Why did people do whatever they did? That was what ethnology wanted to know. So Dave asked why. Quite simply and directly, without circumlocution, as one must talk to a simple savage.

"Why did you do that, João? Why did you save me, when you might have let me go? The load of trade goods would have been yours, and there would have been one white man the less on the river; which, as you have been saying this past month, would be a good thing."

And quite simply João answered him, as surlily as ever.

"Because the *ipa-ges*, the Old Wise Ones who talk with the spirits of the dead, have said that a white man would come who would be different, and surely Kariwa is different from all other white men. Moreover Ipa-Thathaoh, the spirit who owns this rapid, has taken his sacrifice, and one is usually enough."

Dave's eyes were suddenly clear of water. He looked around his side of the boat. He heaved himself up on the gunwale to peer over the other side. "Where is the other man?"

João thrust his chin out to point down to the pool.

There was no man there, nor any clinging form on the farther rocks. Only, in the pool, a swirling vortex of swarming piranha!

"Kariwa can write that down in a book," João said with dull apathy. "Now he knows. Bones sink to the bottom in a pool."

Dave stared at the man, then at the others. The faces of all of them were the same. Apathetic, callous, Dave thought again, to life and death. And again the question came to him. Why?

He did not voice it but João volunteered a dark explanation.

"Worse things happen on this river—since the white men came."

What worse things? What white men? Questions. Only questions surged in Dave's mind. Questions to be noted and tabulated and their answers meticulously set down upon paper. But João for a whole month had remained a man surly and morose, not one to answer a white man's questions—not directly. Information came from him only inadvertently, when he spoke the simple thoughts of a savage, which were often enough difficult for a white man to understand.

"Moreover," João was saying, "even if he had escaped the pool, on the lower flats are the caimans. No man escapes the caimans."

The warm brown water was suddenly cold against Dave's skin. He could understand the caimans, though he had seen none as yet. He had seen only cold speckled eyes floating and a thin scaly ridge of bone connecting them to nostrils so sensitive to air vibrations that they were almost ears. Motionless. Headed always upstream. Waiting.

João shrugged, as he had learned to do from the white men. *"Doetch-kha!"* he shouted. "Let's go! Here it is finished. What the river does, it does. No man can argue with the river."

Dave, too, shrugged acceptance of what he was beginning to learn that was not in books. Back home, where civilization was, there would be an outcry and a scurrying, and men would futilely drag the pool to fish up dead bones. Why? Because it was one of the rules of civilization, written down in books of laws and ethics and what not. But the river knew only its own rules. And a lot of water was coming down the river from farther up, where there was even less civilization.

YES, a lot of water, half a mile wide and racing mad with the close of the rainy season, was coming down the Rio Tamari this year. In a month or so, as the foothills dried out, there would be much less. But anybody who came then would have just that much less time for his work in the upper jungles before the next furious rainy season would drive him out again.

One would think that there would not be many competitors amongst cultured men of science for so poisonous a job in the farthest reaches of a dangerous tropical river. But Science, for those strangely earnest men who are stricken with its lure, is a master as inhuman as is gold. David Carewe knew of at least three others who had pulled every academic wire to get the job, and he suspected that least two others had offered to go for no pay at all.

Dave had won the unremunerative prize because he knew more about those back jungles out of his books than any of the others, and because his back was stronger than any of theirs. Little enough equipment to carry into the upper tributaries of the Amazon jungles, but enough to win for Dave his big chance —and, by golly, Dave grunted to himself many a time during the long grind,

why not enough for a man to survive those jungles, if he kept his head level and his eyes open, and *if* he had the requisite nerve?

So Dave looked at the stolid brown men who took so stoically what their river gave, and he bit his teeth together hard. By golly, if brown men could stick it out for a few dollars in trade goods, a white man could stick it for the sake of Science. But he didn't say it to himself in stilted scientific language.

He'd have to stick it, he growled. He'd have to prove his worth on this trip. If he didn't he'd probably not get another chance.

"All right!" He said. "*Doetch-kha*, João. What the river has done, it has done. Let's go!"

João looked at him with unreadable brown eyes.

"Kariwa stills wants to go farther on this river?"

João had hired out to white men before, and some few things about white men he could understand, but not David Carewe nor the strange reasons that impelled him.

"Of course, I want to go farther." Dave told him. "Dammit, I've got to go farther. And I've told you my reasons."

João remained stubbornly unconvinced. "Yes, Kariwa has said he wants to go as far as the balata *sitio* of Rabeira Thick Nose. But no man can make any money out of Rabeira the Killer, and all that white men want is money."

Dave had met the same thing throughout the long trip. João was suspicious of his motives, and was opposed to this white man's making any combination with any other white men. But the resistance was no more than passive. White men dominated the river, even as far back as this, and Indians had wretchedly learned to bow to the white man's will.

"Moreover," João mumbled his suspicions, "no man can understand how Kariwa speaks our language and yet says in the same tongue that he has never been here before."

Dave felt that his obligation to the sullen fellow was too recent to let him be angry at him. He tried to explain.

"But I don't know your language. Your language is the Tamaruni of your tribe. I know only some Geral, which is what is left of the language of a great people who have died off—the Tupi-Guarani. They even had a writing and could read, as your people have forgotten. But the remnants of their language is now spoken by all the tribes of all the upper rivers who are descended from them. Thus may all the tribes talk with each other and with traders. I learned it from a missionary in my own country who came home sick."

João still mumbled bewilderment. "Yes, many people have died off since the white men first came. Poor *Indios* do not know how long ago. People who do not write things down, how should they know what happened before their fathers died? Perhaps the *Ipa-ges* who are old and wise know. All right. *Doetch-kha!* Let's go. What the river wills to happen will happen."

THE same desperate travel commenced again. Pulley-haul and heave over murderous rocks; paddle across deadly pools. Who could understand why any man would want to do these things for the foolish reasons that he insisted were true?

One of the brown men grunted and pointed with his chin away upstream. The others grunted in chorus and helped him point.

A small one-man dugout, an *uba*, was drifting an erratic course in mid-current. A black silhouette against the shimmery water, it weaved and spun as the eddies caught it. Empty it must be. Yet at that distance it seemed to have a curiously ragged edge, and the sun glistened on highlights that moved.

Dave heaved himself up to get a knee over the *batelão's* gunwale and reached in for his rifle.

His first month of river travel had taught him a vital rule: anything unusual in the jungles might act unusually. And the next great rule that he had learned was that preparedness nearly always resulted in safety.

João, whose eyesight had never been taxed by looking at anything so small and close as print upon white paper, grunted to his men.

"Vultures," João said.

Dave's level brows came didactically together. "The Tamari tribes don't put their dead out in canoes; not according to Wallace or Scharnholtz."

"Not dead," João said. "Or the vultures would not be sitting, waiting."

The brown men grunted again, all together, and lifted their heads, like animals sniffing, turning their ears to catch stealthy eddies of sound. Then Dave caught it too. A dim throbbing in the air, fitful in the hot breeze, audible only in intermittent waves; a thrum of something that repeated a definite code. Somewhere in the jungle that crowded down to the very edge of the black boulders; upriver, downriver, somewhere; a curiously all-pervading sound, impossible to locate.

"Ha! Can you read that?" Dave's eyes were suddenly narrow and alert.

João shook water from his lank hair like a spaniel. "Only the *ipa-ges*, the Old Wise Ones, can read the drum talk."

"A signal drum, by golly!" All the gruesome implications of a canoe with a man in it who was not dead and of vultures that waited were lost on Dave while his ears strained to catch the rhythms of that distant drumming. "Scharnholtz recorded that there was one somewhere, but he could never get to see it. By God, if I could collect that drum, my whole expedition would go over."

The canoe was coming into the fast water now. It spun giddily in the preliminary whirlpools. You could discern the ugly birds clinging doggedly with their great blunt claws, you could see their scrofulous bald heads, could hear their croaks as they jostled one another at the board. Whatever might be lying in the canoe bottom was hidden by their close ranks.

The mid-current took hold of the boat, spun it once, as with a vast unseen hand.

"So," said João, "Ipa-Thathaoh, the spirit who owns this rapid, has caught it. Now will be opportunity, while He is busy, for us to push quickly ahead."

The grip of the water spirit dragged the little canoe with increasing speed till it was shooting past as fast as a runaway car. Little wavelets licked hungrily up at its weighted edges.

Dave suddenly shouted. He didn't know why. A sort of subconscious hope that nothing lived behind the screen of waiting birds that might delay his progress to the farther waters where his work had to be done.

A group of the birds at the canoe's center squawked in sudden affright and spread their huge wings; the rest croaked and held grimly on.

It was not Dave's shout that had startled them. A figure heaved itself up from the canoe's bottom. Just a spasm of effort, and then it fell back. The soaring squadron planed down again to perfect landings, and crouched as before, waiting.

Civilization crowded back on Dave with all the horror that white men know when one of their own kind is involved. "A white man!" He shoved the *batelão* off the sand bar that held it. "Call those rope men in, João! We must let down after him! He still lives! Those piranha pools! My God!"

João remained savagely apathetic. He tendered argument perfectly logical to a savage.

"An *Indio* went also to the piranha

pools and it was his fate without a fuss. One white man the less still will not even up the account. Moreover, three hours of this labor lie behind us." And he added, darkly, "People do not interfere with the happenings on this river."

Crowding civilization made Dave suddenly and quite illogically fierce.

"Call them in." He shoved his way along the canoe's gunwale to bulk menacingly over João. Four to one the brown men were, but João called sulkily, and the rope men cautiously shortened down on their rope till they stood belly deep in the water that pushed angry waves up as high as their chests. Their fellows helped their footing. Dave helped with them. He knew now, as well as any one of them, what a slip would mean.

WHERE the canoe had shot down the rapids in seconds, it took the *batelão* nearly an hour to let down with careful maneuvering between the shoreline rocks.

The canoe was long out of sight, but Dave drove his crew of six to their short, round-bladed paddles that they had learned from traders to lash to poles and use more efficiently as oars. Three bends lower down there was the canoe again, floating placidly, the foul birds still motionlessly expectant, certain of the end.

"He still lives." Dave was learning his jungle-craft fast. "The birds still wait. *Aruanatch-kha!* Lay into it."

The double line of birds croaked and hissed at the larger boat, astonishingly unwilling to move from their perches. They clung fiercely on with their thick toes, even when the oar blades beat at them.

João grunted his short callous laugh. "The canoe, in the quiet pool, makes insufficient wind to give them a lift to fly, and there is no room to run for a start."

The glistening feather fringe on the gunwale still hid the bottom of the canoe. Oar blades beat the nearest birds from their perch into the water. There they floated miserably.

"For those," said João callously, "there will be the caimans, after the piranha have eaten off their feet; for the piranha cannot bite through the tough feathers." And with scarcely any change of his apathetic tone he supplemented, looking into the canoe: "*Whau!* It is the white witch doctor. Look, his beard is as yellow as is Kariwa's hair and his head has no hair in the middle. Though he is naked as a mud fish and as brown, it is no doubt that he is a white man."

Dave looked, and his voice choked in his throat, as civilization had taught it to do in the presence of horror.

But João's background of his own stark river had taught him no such inhibitions. He added interesting details. "His thighs have been tied down to the bottom and his hands tied behind him so that he could not free himself. He was given thus naked to the sun and the birds—or to the piranha or the *ipas* of the rapids, whichever one might win him. He was not a bad white man."

"Was?" Dave almost committed the fatal mistake of jumping into the frail canoe. "He is still alive. Take hold there! You there, his feet! Easy now, João! Easy! Under the palm shelter, quick!"

The canoe floated away. The birds croaked ghoulishly and ruffled their glistening black feathers like disappointed devils. Thin little clouds of acrid dust floated from each. Their croaks were curses.

Dave shuffled together a pad of cloth over his lumpy assortment of trade goods and had the man laid upon it. A stimulant! Dave knew about stimulants, as he did about practical first aid. Those were some of the things that he had studied in preparation for his coming into the jungles.

The man's jaws were loose with weakness. There was no trouble in getting

a spoonful of brandy between the lips. It drooled out at the edges, but it was not entirely wasted. The man still breathed. There did not seem to be any wounds about him. It was hideously incredible; but as João said out of his experience of his river, naked and bound he had been given over to whatever the river willed for him.

Dave was still examining the inert figure for at least a merciful bullet hole when the voice came, whispering haltingly.

"The good God will bless you, my son."

"My son!" And João had spoken of him as the white witch doctor. Incredulity surged about him; but what else could be? He put the question.

"Are you— There wasn't any other missionary. Are you Father Ignacio?"

The eyes remained closed, but almost imperceptibly the lids, rather than the head, nodded.

Dave raised the head higher and administered more brandy.

"Lay Brother Stephen told me about you," he said. "I had hoped to meet you. And now—like this."

The weak lips moved in the pale beginnings of a smile. A whisper came through.

"So he—escaped?"

Escaped from what? The question burned in Dave's mind like a hell's flame. But another question, in a wave of scientific fervor, quenched it.

"He said—Is it true? He said you know about the ancient Tupi-Guarani inscription."

For the first time the muscles of the missionary's body responded. The whisper came choked.

"The inscription! It is accursed. Leave it alone, my son. It is the cause of my—" The faint syllable died away. Only the pain of memory remained.

"Forgive me." Dave was immediately contrite. "My interest—I— Rest easy now. We will talk of it later."

DAVE scuffed up a loose pillow of trade cloth and let the limp head sink back onto it. He felt relieved. The missionary was no frail ascetic; his body was brown and sturdy, as it had to be in order to have survived his years in the jungle.

Just exhaustion. Careful feeding and some care would bring him back in a few days. And then—Lay Brother Stephen had said that this zealous colleague of his knew more about the back jungle Indians and their forgotten lore than any man alive, and that—a find that would excite the whole world of science—he might even have found the inscription. Scharnholtz had broken his heart over the elusive rumors about it, but the most that Scharnholtz had ever unearthed was that the inscription existed and that it was plain to see for anybody who could recognize it when he saw it.

Dave's eyes smoldered back to the inert figure. The inscription. The missionary knew about it. Knew enough to add the warning detail that it was the cause of his plight and to leave it alone. Certainly the missionary must have found it.

And he was not dead from it. He would recover. And then—

João's scowl was dark.

"The Tamari," he said, "kill with the blow gun, cleanly, with one breath. The *uirari* poison is clean and fast. This thing is the doing of white men."

"What white men?" Dave demanded, furious more at the dark suggestion of mystery than at the accusation against his color. "Why should white men do this to a priest?"

João shrugged. What white men did to one another was no interest of his.

"White men have fought before this for the balata *sitio* of the Thick Nose."

"But—" Dave's background of safe and sane civilization refused to accept such savagery over a mere gum from a tree.

João shrugged again. "Or for gold," he said.

"There is no gold in the Tamari." Dave flouted the suggestion. "This is volcanic outcrop and the flats are the vegetable silt of ages. Ten generations of hungry white men have proved that. Gold may be in the farther mountains. Not here."

João understood nothing about outcrops or silts. Nor did he care. He just shrugged.

The hot wind interjected itself into the argument. "Boom-bump, boom-a-bup bupp." Slow eddies of air carried the sounds, definitely audible. Or the drumming had recommenced. From somewhere far upriver it seemed to come now, darkly suggestive of jungle secrets. It muttered and stuttered its code of broken rhythms.

The two men stared at one another in the cool dimness of the thatched cabin shelter over the still form of the missionary.

Dave's uncertainty was a frenzy of impotence. "If only I knew what that was saying!"

"Only the *ipa-ges,*" João repeated his credo. "Only the Old Wise Ones can read that talk. But I can read, having heard it many times since the white men came. A man is going to die—that is what it says."

Dave stared at him.

"Also," João added, "it is a white man who is going to die. But I do not know how the ruler of the drum can know so quickly that this white man is so near to death."

Dave flung himself back from his crouching position. "He isn't going to die." His cry was a savage denial. "He is strong. He is already recovering. The drum can't know. Damn it, he can't die. He has information that is priceless. He knows about the Guarani inscription."

João shrugged. "It may be that Kariwa is right. Kariwa knows many things. Perhaps it is for another white man. Many men died these days. *Doetch-kha!* Let's go. If—" He stared darkly at Dave— "If Kariwa still wants to go to the sitio of Rabeira Thick Nose."

João's darkly suggestive shrug was getting to be a madness.

"Who interferes with the river and the jungle," he said, "the jungle and the river interfere with him."

"Well, I'm going to interfere," Dave swore. "If for no other reason, because a man of my home town has put his faith in me to supply me with money for this trip, and I'm not going to let that man down."

"That is a reason," João said, "that a man can understand.

Doetch-kha!" And the long grind up the rapids that belonged to Ipa-Thath-aoh commenced all over again.

At intervals, when the *batelão* stranded on the shallows in fast water above the piranha pools, Dave climbed into the cabin and administered, by the careful teaspoon, thin doses of the strong British meat extract of Bovril that can be purchased in any trade store at the farthest corners of the earth.

His patient absorbed them without speech, always with closed eyes. But his pulse grew stronger.

"Of what use?" João grunted. "The drum has said that he is to die."

"You're a fool, João," Dave growled at him.

João only shrugged.

CHAPTER II

MAN-TRAP

THE balata *sitio* of Rabeira Thick Nose peeped green and pleasant from behind broad banana leaves and palm fronds. On its summit the *sitio* was a palisaded fort surrounded by a straggle of thatched huts and open sheds. Log canoes were

hauled up on the beach; a *batelão* was moored to a stake. Wood smoke from the boiling balata curled lazily from the eaves of the sheds and flattened out in a thin blue layer, scarcely hot enough to rise in the hot air. Men moved slowly between sheds. Indians, of course, as could be seen by their nakedness. Men dressed as white men, but quite as brown, lounged against posts to direct labor.

It was a scene of bustling industry such as the upper rivers had not seen since the good old days when rubber was king—before that perfidious Englishman, whose name all the rivers cursed daily, stole the prohibited seed and started those competitive plantations in the Straits Settlements. Peaceful and pleasant to see.

As Dave's craft approached, a rifle barked and a bullet plopped into the water in front of the bows.

"What the devil!" Dave grabbed for his own rifle. "What does a pirate signal like that mean?"

João took it calmly. "It is the custom at this place. It means that we must be inspected before we may go farther."

"But"—Dave's independence was outraged—"suppose we don't want to stop here. The river is a free road."

"Yes," said João. "People in the town that we left four weeks ago say that the road is free. But none the less it is Rabeira who decides who may go into the balata country farther on."

Dave grunted, buckled a pistol belt around his waist.

"This," he grumbled, "looks like another place where preparedness may spell peace."

His lips and eyes pinched down to parallel slits as the *batelão* grounded directly in front of the muzzle of a canvas covered something that could be nothing other than a machine-gun. It was mounted on a sawed-off tree stump, low to the water, so that a burst from it could not fail to cut anything in half that tried to pass on the river.

Dave's studies had exhaustively covered everything extant in print about this Tamari tributary to the Amazon, from the days when hard men first came in with the great scramble for rubber; but none of the records had said anything about a pioneer fortress. They had all reported the Indians as a fine primitive type, and friendly to white men.

Dave's scowl was worried. Friendly cooperation was essential to this work for which he had trained so long.

RABEIRA himself came down to meet the *batelão*. There was no possibility of mistake. An immense man with a face to correspond. At some time in the past his nose, large to start with, had been smashed by what must have been a terrific blow and spread over his cheek bones. Complete lack of medical atten-

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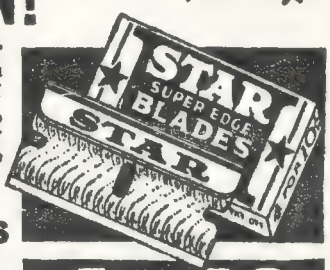

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tion had left it to grow like that, grotesque, gorilloid. Thick arms hung from the short sleeves of a cotton singlet; thick angles below the baggy blue jeans of a gum gatherer ended in rope-soled native shoes. That was all he wore; that and an outsize machete in an alligator hide sheath. And of course a wide brimmed palm matting hat. Only Indians ventured bare-headed into the sun; a hat was the mark of a white man.

The satiny hairlessness of the man's limbs immediately indicated to Dave that there was Indian blood back somewhere, and an incongruous thickening of the lips and too curly back hair betrayed an earlier trace of Negro slave.

A *mestiço* breed by every rule of definition. But that word, *mestiço*, was one of those things that was tactfully left unmentioned amongst those *gomeires* of the upper rivers.

Two other men, similarly dressed, sauntered down with him. Their skins were darker, but by some queer twist of blood strain, there was enough of white in them to need shaving. They loafed down the hill, twirling nothing more dangerous than cigarettes wrapped in brown *tabari* bark between their fingers. But nobody could make any mistake about their being a most formidable reception committee.

Rabeira, as Dave stepped from the *batelão* into the shoal water, was obviously nonplussed by his appearance.

"*Dantacarraças!* Great tapir ticks!" It is a white man!"

All unconsciously he voiced the startling color difference. Then, almost as a challenge: "But you are no gum gatherer."

"Nor even a trader," one of the henchmen supplemented.

Dave announced himself with curt brusqueness.

"*Eu sou* David Carewe, *Americano.*"

"*Cra!* And talks Portuguese!"

"Yes." Dave said crisply. "I have studied much in preparation for this coming."

"And the reason for your coming, *Senhor Americano?*"

"To study further."

A thick grin began to spread Rabeira's lips.

"Your studies, *Senhor Americano*, have not taught you that people do not study this river without permission."

"I am an American citizen." Dave growled. "And I have written permission from the governor of the State of Amazonas to travel where I will in his jurisdiction."

The grin widened, and the henchmen laughed in thin-lipped enjoyment.

"Yes," Rabeira nodded, "we keep hearing about that governor. He sends us messages and tells us that this is his jurisdiction. Your books, *Senhor*, have not taught you that here is the jurisdiction of Rabeira Aranha." He jerked his great head towards Dave's boat. "Go look it over, you two, and see what he may have that is suspicious."

The henchmen inspectors slouched forward. A formidable pair—much more formidable than any customs inspectors that anybody's book had ever noted.

And Dave had some suspicions of his his own that João's dark insistence had inculcated.

It would be a pity, João said, if these people should find out about the missionary whom somebody somewhere along this river had tied down to torture in an open canoe. He stepped in front of the men. The crispness in his voice took on a hard edge.

"People do not look over my boat without permission."

There was no argument about that, as there might have been with inspectors anywhere else. One of the henchmen rasped his machete from its sheath.

Before it was well out, Dave's gun was smoothly in his hand.

The men stopped in mid-action. Tense in their arrested motion, not afraid. Guns were nothing new. Rabeira could even be appreciative.

"Carracas! You do that well. Like a cowboy of the cinema." His eyelids drooped to give him the expression of a sleepy jaguar. *"Senhor* is perhaps what the cinema calls a gunman, imported to—"

A certain grim humor twitched about Dave's tight lips.

"Not a cowboy," he said. "In fact, from a small city in our farm belt. This is one of the things I studied."

Rabeira's knowledge of men was more than enough to convince him that just now was a time to temporize.

"Perhaps *Senhor* would condescend to tell us more."

"Since you ask decently, all right. I'm an ethnologist. My special study is American Indians. I came here to complete research unfinished by a previous explorer of thirty years ago. I got the assignment because I'm young enough to cover tough traveling that better workers than I perhaps could not, and because I took the trouble to prepare myself for just this trip. And I'm telling you," Dave's mouth pinched down, "I'm going to make it, and make good on it."

"Um ethno-lo-gico?" Rabeira pieced out the syllables with what might have been relief in his heavy voice. "A man of science, you mean, who measures Indians' heads and collects the pots and beads that they make?"

"Yes, an ethnologist." Dave was sensitive about the implication of scientific futility. "But more than just pots and beads."

Rabeira was not interested in people's sensitivities.

"You can, no doubt, prove this, *Senhor?"*

"Of course. I have my credentials from my museum."

RABEIRA'S lips suddenly spread to a gale of African laughter. His great head rocked to show every perfect white molar.

"Qué brinco! What a joke! What a facetiousness is this! An almost killing over nothing! Ticks bite me, if this is not a theater! Who else but a scientist would think of such a reason?" He rolled his head to roar mirth again. *"Senhor* will excuse us. We thought he must be —but let that pass. We will look into your credentials later. It may be that you can fit into my organization. A student of these Indians is perhaps what we need. An efficiency expert, no less, to find out means of getting a full quota of labor out of the savages."

Dave, looking at the man's quick change of humor, saw a sudden vivid picture of that other big mixed breed, Cristophe of Haiti, who lost every other human sensibility in his delusion of grandeur. The man before him was as crazy, certainly as dangerous.

"Senhor." Rabeira boomed hospitality. "You will first eat lunch with us, me and my lieutenant Assio DaCosta. It is not much, for us who know the better things, but the best that this savage country can offer.

"Come, we shall lunch as gentlemen together, and then I will show you this balata that I have discovered to take the place of rubber that used to be the wealth of the rivers."

He laid a great hand on Dave's shoulder to propel him up the hill. Dave felt the power of it; and the repulsion. He went along, but his scientific integrity rebelled against Rabeira's assumption of credit.

"You didn't discover balata," he said bluntly. "The tree, mimusops balata, was reported by a Dr. Aranha while you must have been still a boy. So don't give me that stuff."

Rabeira was still full of good humor. "Ah, yes. We scientists must be meticulous. But who, let me ask you, discovered the commercial extraction of the gum?"

"That was Vargas Holm, the Brazilio-Norwegian," Dave insisted.

"Holm!" Rabeira roared the name. His hand on Dave's shoulder gripped down to the bone. "Dog's blood! What do you know about that name?" His face was suddenly feral and the breath snorted and spluttered through his flattened nose.

Dave unwound the clutching fingers from his shoulder one by one and put away the hand.

"Holm? I know that he developed balata somewhere in these upper rivers and that he died a couple of years ago."

Rabeira's eyes glowered at him like a jaguar's, sullenly awake and suspicious.

"You seem to know a lot, *Senhor*, about what happens in these upper rivers."

"But certainly," Dave said. "I studied everything that was available."

Rabeira grunted, like an animal getting its teeth into meat. "Yes, he died." He said it almost with regret. "Or, if he did not, it is I who assure you that he will."

RABEIRA was sulky all the way up the hill to his stockaded cluster of adobe buildings. But he grumbled the conventional welcome. "The house is yours, *Senhor*. Occupy yourself as you will while I arouse these sluts of mine to produce a meal."

Dave found himself in the fantastic neo-barbarity of a domicile fit for an African king. He had seen dozens of them along the banks of the lower river: straggly, tin-roofed buildings of adobe, calsomined in heavenly blues and canned salmon pinks. Built by illiterate *mestiço* pioneers, suddenly grown rich on rubber, they had, in their time, represented the savage last word in magnificence. With rubber's decline they had kept exact pace, and they stood now on a par with the death of a vast natural business killed by scientific plantation production.

Dave's first view of an interior was as instructive to him as a lecture on the manners and customs of the pioneer builders.

A tarantula-haunted veranda opened into an immense room with walls of glazed Valencian tiles of lurid Moorish designs—and a stamped mud floor. Rain had rusted the corrugated iron roof and rotted the painted canvas ceiling. It was easier, in these days, to move into another room than to import corrugated roofing.

Huge French plate mirrors in gilded frames hung askew on the walls, too big to set up in the other room. It was easier to nail up jagged pieces of one that had broken.

A grand piano, that must have cost pyramidal labor to drag over the lower rapids, stood in a corner, its legs sunken in the moist floor, its veneer warped, its strings squirming from its rusted interior like springs of a huge broken clock.

Dave wandered further, expecting to find gilt-canopied four posters in ornate bedrooms—and there just were no bedrooms.

Sleeping rooms were furnished with a stout post set in the center and garnished with strong hooks, from which occupants slung their hammocks to other strong hooks on the wall.

Nor had bathrooms yet entered the consciousness of the upper rivers. All the lavishness had been concentrated to display in *o locutorio*, the parlor, where people sat to talk and to admire.

There were dozens of these decadent rubber *sitios* dotted all along all the rivers of Amazonas, such of the rooms as did not leak inhabited by depressed, hook-wormy people who had known their magnificence and who now lounged, dungaree-clad, in verminous verandas and talked wistfully of what they would do "when the price of rubber comes back." And it would never come back. Jungle rubber could never compete with the plantation price.

Civilization had crept sluggishly up to the upper rivers and had crept away again, defeated by the jungle. Once there had been a law in the old rubber country—a law at least as nominal as the law of the old gold camps, back in the days when rubber was black gold. And now Rabeira was the law and a far-away governor sent him futile messages.

All of it explained to Dave the ferocious conflict for this new blood that was beginning to ooze along the old channels —balata, the gummy white latex that would bring new life to jungle *sitios* on the point of death.

Rabeira came bellowing: *"Bom. Por fim he servido.* The lazy wenches have at last served something. Not much, *Senhor,* for us who know how gentlemen should live; but food at last."

A pair of sullen, naked breasted Indian women served the meal—the best, as Rabeira continued to apologize, that the country could offer—dried *pira-rucu* fish boiled tasteless to get the salt out of it, and coarse *farhina* of grated yam: the awful standard of all the Amazon headwaters. Meat was a rare treat only when some Indian was lucky enough to spear a manatee and was foolish enough to let his masters know about it or when the monkeys came back after the rainy season.

It is a little crude here," Rabeira admitted, "for people of refinement. There was a time when I could have had you waited upon by a white woman. But—" He shrugged, as at a loss that was a temporary annoyance.

Dave wondered darkly what horror was behind that careless shrug what shivery story of a white woman cast amongst these men, protected by a law that was only Rabeira.

Rabeira was launched on a paean of his own grandiloquent plans.

"But wait, *amigo.* Wait only until I have organized the production. These Indians are obstreperous and need some disciplining yet to teach them their function for which the good God put them here. But with tact one succeeds. They are not so troublesome now as they used to be. When my production is organized to full capacity I will have a new piano dragged up over these rapids, and gilded mirrors for these rooms, as good as any rubber king ever had in the rich old days."

"Do you play?" Dave just controlled his tone from showing surprise.

"Not I. But a man of culture needs music, is it not? And, who knows, my agents may catch me some musician down there who"—He threw his head back and laughed hugely at the droll thought—"Who has not studied so much about the upper rivers, *Senhor,* as you have, and who might be persuaded to come up."

"But he would soon go down again," Dave was convinced. "And your piano would be out of tone in a month in this humid heat."

Rabeira's laugh spluttered through his big white teeth.

"He would learn to tune it; it is I who assure you. And—" His thick fingers balled to a clutching fist on the table—"nobody goes down this river, or up, without my permission. But for you, *Senhor,* rest assured, you have it. For the advancement of science we place no difficulties in the way of our efficiency expert."

"Our efficiency expert!" It was grimly obvious that the man had already attached Dave to his staff of ruffians, just as that other monster, Jean Cristophe, collected about himself wretched captives who might add to his prestige. And just as those captives were safe as long as they pleased their captor, Dave would be safe—until the monster would detect the inevitable loathing that Dave knew he would never be able to conceal. Or until he would inevitably find out about that other white man who was sick in the *batelão.*

DAVE wriggled in pretense of scratching the all-pervasive stinging flies, and under cover of the motion he worked his gun from its holster and held it pressed against the bottom of the table with his knee. He prayed that the shaking of his knee might not dislodge it. And all at once he knew that he was afraid and frightfully without experience.

"Tell us," the monster said, "something of your work. A scientist, you say. Yet you look, permit me to observe, more like an athlete."

Suspicion was innate in the man. Of what was he secretly afraid? Dave clutched eagerly at the thought that this great brute could be afraid of something, and with the thought he found that he had sufficient courage of his own to sour at the prevalent imputation of highbrow futility.

He even snarled his response. "You expect to see spectacles and a goat beard. But even scientists play at games sometimes. Mine happens to be water polo. And if you think that's a sissy one, you try it some time. But that's neither here nor there. I'm here because I plugged along four years till I dug up a patron to put up the money for just this trip. That's how small museums like mine work. And that's why I'm damn well going to collect this Tamari country. Because if I don't, I'll never drum up another chance till I have the spectacles and beard."

Rabeira roared his appreciation.

Qué bravo! And such a man collects pots and beads! But be tranquil, *Senhor. Por causa da sciencia,*" Rabeira grandly smote his chest, "you shall have my help."

"Collecting," Dave told him uncompromisingly, "requires cooperation with the natives and their friendship. But information is something that you may be able to give me. A drum, one of these signal drums, would be a prize that would assure my success."

"A drum? *Carraças! The* drum, you mean. There is but one such damned thing in the whole district."

"They're very old and rare, I know." Dave said. "There are only three in the U. S. Big museums have them. If I could get one—"

Da Costa spoke for the first time during the whole session. He spoke quickly, and in the Geral dialect.

"If this fool's enthusiasm for research could find out which one of the *ipa-ges* works this accursed drum, we could use him. Then make a raid and teach them a lesson."

Dave's pulse pounded in his head, but he managed to continue to look innocent.

"Oh! Ah, yes. He was saying," Rabeira explained, "that this drum is very difficult to find. It is, in fact, a sort of tribal fetish. They do not keep it in any one place, but carry it about, mounted in a special canoe, through a maze of back jungle creeks. That much our good Da Costa twisted from a jungle Indian before the man, unfortunately, died. And with this accursed drum they signal all our moves and organize their stubborn resistance to the march of industry and civilization."

"Oh!" said Dave. "Ah yes. Twisted, did you say, from an Indian?"

Rabeira's laugh was unconscious of any reproach. "Twisted in very truth. They are stubborn, these damned *Indios,* about giving any information to us white men, as you, no doubt, have already discovered in your travel with them up river.

"But our good Da Costa has his methods—methods that he learned from reading some books of religion that a—a previous resident left here when we came to organize this industry. Haw-haw-haw!" The great ox laughed his African glee at the hugeness of the joke. "Books that told of the methods employed by the good priests of the inquisition upon these same *Indios*

and upon other good men of stout religious principles who happened to disagree with their own dogmas."

His humor soured as quickly as it had burst forth. "Stubborn fellows, these men of religion. May their God curse their souls. They do not tell, even under the most improved methods."

Dave's blood pounded suddenly in his temples. He was ready, now that he had experienced the hospitality of Rabeira and his good lieutenant, to believe the worst of his own suspicions. His hand rearranged the gun pressed to the table by his quivering knee. He was surprised that his voice was as calm as it was.

"You have had some differences, I take it, with men of religion. All the books say that trade and missionaries cannot agree. Myself, in my trade, I find that missionaries often have information about folk lore and such near-scientific matter. I was, in fact, hoping to meet such a one somewhere up here."

"*Como dic'?* What is that you say?" Rabeira's rage roared forth in a tornado of brute sound. "You hoped to meet this damned—" He growled out of his belly to Da Costa in the Geral: "Send a couple of men to look through that boat and report immediately. Until I hear from them I'll hold this clever innocent who is so fast with his gun. If he's trying to fool us we'll send him on the same road as the blasted priest."

DAVE'S start nearly shook the gun from his knee. While he was still in his desperate indecision whether to make his break now, Rabeira's machete was half out of its sheath. But Rabeira was not quite so animal that he couldn't think. Slowly, while he glared his jaguar stare, he let the blade slip back.

Dave hoped, he prayed, that it might be because Rabeira carried no gun. But even if not, how many men were there with rifles just outside? It was inexperience again that held Dave's hand. While his brain raced with his indecision, Da Costa left the room, and there was Rabeira's distorted face thrusting at him across the table and growling from his belly:

"Ss-so! Now it comes out, my innocent. You thought perhaps we were fools enough not to know. You come here pretending to be a man of pots and beads, and what you come for is really to find out about the inscription about the lost city back in these jungles with its treasure."

Dave was astounded at this new angle. In his need to temporize with Rabeira until he could make his getaway he scouted the thought.

"Don't be a fool, Rabeira. There is no lost city and no treasure. There couldn't ever have been. Not in these jungles. When the Inca peoples were driven from the mountains by the conquistadores, and they in turn drove the foothill Tupi-Guarani tribes into the jungles, the Guarani had no culture sufficient to build any cities. They were emerging from naked savagery just enough to have a writing, and that is all."

"Don't try to befool me with your scientific babblings." Rabeira's great hands were clawing at the table surface, and Dave noted with a sort of horror that the strong finger nails took little chips from the wood. "Don't you think you can fool me any longer. Everybody knows that such an inscription exists; and what would there be an inscription for, unless for something valuable? For something so valuable that these accursed savages pretend to know nothing about it, while everybody knows that it is there, somewhere, for anybody to find who can read it."

"You're still being a fool." Dave said, and Rabeira, in his fury about the rival quest for his insisted treasure, let the lesser insult pass. "It is possible that many such inscriptions have survived. You know about this one because it has

been reported by explorers in the past. It can't refer to treasure, because the Guarani never had any treasure. The only treasure would be scientific knowledge, and that, to science, would be priceless, since no example of the Guarani script has been found."

"Bah!" Rabeira exploded. "If you believe that, it is you who are a fool. Why did that damned missionary spend his life hunting for it, if it would not be an additional treasure for his church; and why would he be so stubbornly close-mouthed about it, if—"

Da Costa sidled back into the room.

"Two have gone," he said in Geral. "They will report as soon as they have searched thoroughly."

Rabeira remained, his body shoved half across the table, his breath wheezing through his flattened nose. The glare in his eyes smoldered down to angry cunning. Dave guessed, from their direction, that he was thinking about that gun that he had last seen at Dave's belt, close to his fast hand.

"It may be that you are right." It was Rabeira who was temporizing now. "Treasure or no treasure, you, no more than I, will ever find out from that damned missionary. Let it pass. Come, I will show you my factory of balata, that, in the long run, will yield more treasure than any lost temples out of these jungles."

Dave's relief was a surging prayer in his heart. Outside, he would have a chance to make his break. He would be able to see who might be covering him and where. It was sheer magic how he managed to get his gun back into his holster before he rose from the table and was the first out of the door.

His eyes went desperately to his boat. But from up here he couldn't see it. It was hidden by the thick palms that shaded the hill. And thank God for that. Until the men came to report their finding of the missionary, he would have time to think, to plan, to maneuver somehow to place himself for a getaway.

The most terrific effort of his life was to continue his affectation of nonchalance as he walked beside the two ruffians and was careful not to let them get him between them.

"Come," Rabeira boomed. "Let us yet be friends." His eyes were not on Dave's face; they were on the gun at his belt. His thick fingers curled with the itch to make a grab, but Rabeira balled his fists to restrain himself. "Come," he growled. "I will show you my factory."

THE factory consisted of the open thatched sheds that had been visible from the river. Matchete-armed "white men" lounged and smoked endless brown cigaretes. Sullen Indians toiled at the crude processes of preparation.

With each farther step through the shed Dave began to be convinced that the morose, wolf-faced Da Costa who managed them was a more loathsome person than his great bombastic animal of a master.

The tour opened with a swish of a lash through the air and a howl from the shed nearest to the jungle.

Da Costa's expression showed no interest.

"That will be one of the sap gatherers, who has brought in too much bark and dirt with his latex," he explained. "Those fellows must be watched constantly. Otherwise the dirt becomes a nuisance in this shed. And in this one we boil it down in these big coppers with constant stirring, as you see."

It was appalling to Dave that these men could be so care-free while they waited for a report from the two who had gone to investigate—while he waited to see them, at any moment, come racing up the hill, shouting their deadly news. But then, why shouldn't they be care-free? Dave's skin chilled and his hot pulse ebbed away from his wrists. They were twenty and he was one.

The tour of inspection dragged on like a march from a death cell. Dave saw sweating men standing over great flat pans of copper, straining at wooden paddles that moved sluggishly through the thickening gum. As he watched, a scalding drop spattered onto a bare shin and immediately stuck fast. The man yelped and let it stick. If he would pull it off, flies would deposit maggot-breeding eggs in the sore. Dave noted that every copper tender was scarred thigh high with round white blotches.

And that was all there was to this much vaunted factory, except the finished product, which Rabeira exhibited like a man might display gold.

Big oval slabs of a toughly resilient whitish material, impervious to rain or sun—in fact, to almost anything but fire.

Rabeira toed a lump. "The best grade goes into submarine cable insulation, the second grade into machine belting. It is much more valuable than rubber ever was at its best price, and it means the industrial development of the upper rivers, the opening up of the jungle. When I shall have developed my production and beaten my labor into shape I will have an empire here."

He swelled like a ruthless Napoleon visualizing conquest.

Dave's eyes remained on the path that led up from the river. His fingers were gripped tight in his belt close to his gun butt. A dozen men lounged in full view and at least half as many rifles were within quick reach.

He fought with his nerves to hold himself down. It was a hammering pain in his brain, wondering how long he could hold himself to pretend calmness till a better opportunity should come. At any minute, at any second now, the searchers must come whooping up the hill screaming that they had found the sick priest. And then—Well, then it would have to be fight, fast and furious.

Desperately Dave judged distances and positions. He could get Rabeira and Da Costa anyhow, and then the others—perhaps the others would be sufficiently cowed by swift gunplay to let him hold them off till he could back down the path. He was still able to make his voice casual.

"I see why your labor labors," he said. "But I'm damned if I can understand why, when once it has gotten into the jungle, it ever comes back."

Rabeira rocked back in vast laughter again.

"This one—Ha-ha! This one is the best joke of all. This you will appreciate. You saw the row of huts within the corral. It is there that we look after their women and brats for them. As long as their women stay, they stay. It is all simple, no?"

To Dave it was not all so simple. He was able to make his voice say:

"I wouldn't believe the poor fools would be so damn dumb as to bring their families."

Rabeira could hardly pronounce coherent words through his bellowing mirth over that grandest of all jokes. "Innocent, you are in some matters, my clever friend. They don't bring their families in. That is just it. That is why our good Da Costa must make raids into the jungle to catch them, and that is where this accursed drum comes in, with which they signal their warnings to each other."

Even the taciturn Da Costa's upper lip curled away from pointed teeth at his chief's tribute to this greatest of all jokes. Capture the women, and the men, like faithful dumb animals, followed. It was all so simple.

Dave knew. Away back in his civilized brain he knew that he ought to be appalled with disgust and loathing for this callous admission of trading upon the nearest thing to civilized sentiment that naked savages possessed. But Dave had other things to occupy his brain. By God's grace no men had come racing up the hill yet with a report of their

discovery. Dave could not stand that tension any longer. He felt that he must break; that his sheer nerve reactions would suddenly drive him to make a dash for something that would probably be disastrous. He would have to get away from this, and just now seemed to be a time, while these ruffians were in a good humor.

He was able even to laugh at the hugeness of Rabeira's joke. Between breaths he said: "That is a good one. Certainly a good one. I shall want to hear more about your system. But, you will excuse, just now I must go to my boat. I have learned many things to note."

Rabeira's eyes went to Da Costa. Da Costa only shrugged. In Geral he said: "Easy, easy, *Padrão*. This fellow is a devil with that gun. Our boys must be finding things, and when they report, maybe we shall have another joke."

Rabeira roared again at that, his head thrown back and his eyes closed in the contortions of his face. Dave went away under cover of that mirth. It was all he could do to hold himself from running down the path. Round a bend through the trees his *batelão* came in sight. He had been half afraid to look. But there it floated, placid and peaceful. From behind him a duet of gorilla laughter followed.

DAVE forced his feet to measured steps that were an agony of taut nerves. He waded slowly out into the shallow water to climb aboard. His eyes were flashing to every detail, while his mind refused to believe the placidity of everything.

There his Indians squatted on the bamboo slats of the raised forward deck. Their faces were dumbly without expression. João looked at him owlishly. There was not a sign, not a trace, of any excitement such as there must have been over two men coming to make a search of the boat.

And then Dave's eyes noted another thing. He was standing half knee-deep in the water. Fish dashed in and out amongst his feet. A darting horde of them. Dave's impulse was to snatch his feet up both at once. Piranha! But his study of years insisted that piranha could not bite through canvas shoes or dungaree pants. Inexorable science had proven that it was a sheer impossibility for the muscular strength of their jaws to bite through a stout shoe. And piranha required blood to attract them in their deadly hordes.

Without moving his head, his eyes traveled over the water up and around the sides of his boat.

And then he saw it. A thin smear of blood oozed from between the strake and the lower plank. In a crooked little pattern it cut a red path down the boat's side and tinged the brown water.

Dave gulped and plunged towards the boat. João squatted without moving. Only his voice came sidewise.

"*Cua kheh-neh, Kariwa.* Men may be watching. Come on board quietly."

Dave stood at the gunwhale. From below the keel, from the farther side of the boat, piranha swarmed about his feet.

Dave snatched them up in a mad scramble and rolled into the boat. His eyes rolled into position to look into the thatched cabin. Blinking, Dave could make out the form of his patient. It lay just as he had last left it. Peacefully still. Then Dave's enlarging pupils could see the stain. A great blotch of it that smeared his trade goods and connected its dark path to the woodwork.

João's voice came in its monotone.

"They came. Two men of the *sitio*. They saw the white witch doctor, and, saying no word, they knifed him."

DAVE was lying on the deck as though resting. He remained just so. His nerves were slowly taking hold again.

"What?" Speech came thickly from

his throat. "What happened then?" Rage began to wave through his being. "Why didn't you fight? Why didn't you do something, you—"

Foolish rage. He recognized it in the same second. Why should these Indians, with their experience of white men, bestir themselves in the white men's affairs?

João's voice remained a low monotone.

"The fight was short, Kariwa. They knifed him before we could suspect them. And then—Since we now are sure that Kariwa is an enemy of the Big Nose, we snatched the blow gun darts that were hidden in the palm thatch, as Kariwa did not know, and within the time that a man can draw one breath it was finished. Two of them."

"Thunder!" Dave was glad that he was lying prone. "Now we've done it!" Without definite volition his mind was associating himself with his savage Indians.

"They'll find the bodies and—What about the bodies? Where have you stuffed them? Now we're in a fight."

For the first time João's owl stare crinkled to a human grin.

"Nobody will find anything, Kariwa. The bodies—we took their clothes off and—and they are on the farther side of the boat, where no watcher from the shore side can see. They are tied with a string, so that they will not float clear. Piranha. And bones, Kariwa, will sink to the bottom."

Dave pushed himself up to a sitting position.

"We must push off," he ordered. "Already they are wondering why the two have not returned with a report. Get the oars ready and make a dash upstream. The trees are thicker there; they will offer some shelter. Quick!"

"Upstream is good." João grunted. "For there is my own village. And the bones must by this time be sunk." He heaved his body to peer over the farther gunwale. There he grunted, and with a red-bladed machete cut a trailing line. "This also may Kariwa write in a book," he said, "that within the space of time he was up there in the Big Nose house the bones were shredded and ready"

The *batelão* surged away from that ghastly place. The sturdy muscles of the Indians bunched over their oars. The speed of the boat was a lift to Dave's heart. And in the next moment, shooting past a little nest amongst the shore shrubbery, his heart fell through the

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very soles of his shoes. There, snugly nested, was a big *batelão*. Of course the *sitio* would have its own *batelão*. A big one too. A dozen men would man the oars and overhaul the fugitives.

João grinned at it.

"In that one," he said. "We made a hole with one of the machetes."

Dave could have embraced the man, only that his broad back was bulging with his strain over his oar.

A yell came from up on the hill. A confusion of yells. A rifle slammed with the flattened sound of explosion amongst trees. More rifles.

"Out!" Dave shouted. "Out-stream and over. We can't hide any longer! Lay to it now."

The open landing place came into view, and again Dave's heart skipped its beat. In the open landing place was that canvas covered something that could be nothing other than a machine-gun, and men were racing downhill towards it.

A bounding figure was tearing at the canvas cover, while two others fumbled with deadly looking round cans. Dave's rifle was steady in his hands. He waited for a momentary steadiness of the boat. He pressed the trigger and instantly slammed the bolt out and in again.

One of the men yelled and spun away from the gun—spun like a top before he fell.

"Thank God for that!" Dave said piously.

The other two men at the gun yelled. Men yelled up on the hillside. Rifles slammed. Little geysers spouted from the water about the boat. But shooting through the tree fringe around the hill was tricky and uncertain.

DAVE'S sights were steady over the machine-gun again. He fired. Another of the gunners dropped, rolled, and began to crawl on hands and knees. Dave's rifle covered him, but it swung away, back to the third man.

Something went off like a blast in front of Dave's face where he lay along the gunwale. Red comets flared before his vision, and he was blind. But he could feel. His hand dashed to his face and was scored along the back by a wooden splinter that still stuck in the skin of his forehead.

It left his right eye clear. Through that one he saw a figure kneeling at the water's edge, clear of the trees, sighting for another shot. He snapped a fast one at the figure. It remained on its knees, and Dave could see the whole front of its face go red. Then it leaned forward, and further forward, and lay face-down in the shallow.

"For that one," João grunted with each heave of his body, "the piranha!"

Dave found time to snatch for a handkerchief and wipe fearfully at his face. The other eye opened. He could see.

A jarring roar commenced from lower down the bank. A long burst of staccato noise. The *batelão* positively heeled to the impact of bullets that slammed into its hull at the rate of eight in every second. Low over the water. In the next second the line of fire would rise. Dave jerked his rifle across in a frenzy. The staccato roar stopped. No other figures raced for the machine-gun in the open.

Shots slammed from farther up the hill, amongst the trees. Geysers spouted sporadically. It amazed Dave that their range seemed so short and their accuracy so poor. Trade rifles, he knew in the next second. Good enough for close quarters, where they would blow a hole as big as a dollar piece through a man's body. Good against naked Indians, but a long way from modern weapons. It came to Dave with more prayerful thankfulness than he had known in half a lifetime that with his small caliber, high velocity gun, he could outshoot them by half a mile.

And then the *batelão* was out where the geysers no longer splashed round.

Dave could take stock. "Anybody

A gunner spun and fell.

hurt?" It was a foolish question, for the boat still sped up the river.

"No," said João. "Thuya-naatheh, who rows in the front, has a hole in his leg; and I bleed from some place in my back that I cannot see. But nobody is hurt."

Callous to pain as to mental suffering. Extraordinary people. But Dave wasn't reasoning with scientific detachment just now. He put it more colloquially.

"Good guys," he said. "Sticking through it and keeping on rowing took guts. I know civilized people who'd have yelled and just let go."

He dived into the cabin for the first aid. Thuya-naatheh's hole in his leg bled a steady red smear on the deck.

"No artery," Dave grunted, but he could have put his thumb into the hole.

"Keep rowing," João grunted. "There will be canoes that we did not find." And Thuya-naatheh did just that. João's own wound was a ragged tear in

the back that needed no more than sticking plaster.

"We were lucky." Dave said.

"So the Old Wise Ones have always promised," said João. "When the deliverer would come, they said, we must put our faith in him, and fortune would remain with us."

"Huh? What deliverer?" Dave wanted to know.

"The deliverer that the Old Wise Ones have promised," said João, as though that explained everything. "What will Kariwa do with the white witch doctor? It is to be feared that his bleeding will have spoiled much of the trade cloth."

Dave stared for the hundredth time at a psychology that was utterly beyond his understanding. But he was beginning to understand something of why these *Indios* of the upper river were so callous to suffering. Anybody could understand that who had seen the *sitio* of Rabeira Thick Nose.

"We must bury him." Dave said.

"We of our tribe," João said, "would put him in a tree. But if Kariwa wants to dig a hole in the ground we will bury him this night, where we shall hide away in a creek that cannot be found by those who do not know."

CHAPTER III

HUNTED

JOÃO expanded under the morning's sun. He stretched his muscular arms and grinned. All his furtive evasiveness of the lower river was gone. He grinned, as though not a care existed in this world of river above the balata *sitio* of Rabeira Big Nose.

His men, intoned a low chant, each line of which concluded in an *ugh* of effort.

"And now where?" Dave asked.

"To the igarape of the water cows. Now that we know surely that Kariwa is not of the Big Nose men, we go to my own people. My tribal house is a half day's travel up the creek, where the Big Nose men do not come because it is narrow and our blow gun darts can reach."

"Safe at all events," Dave said, and with that the dominating impulse of his life woke out of its dark depression. The first inexorable requirement of research work was his. Confidence of the natives.

The eventual return home, how to get out of this trap with the knowledge that he might gain, was a matter for future consideration. Joubert, the Swiss, not so reliable as a scientific observer, but a mighty traveler, reported ascending the Rio Negro to its very mountain beginnings, and on over the Andes to Columbia. If to go back on this Tamari river would be impossible, one might go on, perhaps, and come out alive. Later. For the present, with security in a hidden back creek, peace for work and this priceless confidence, a man could study Indian lore as even Sharnholtz probably never did. Dave reached for his notebook.

"Tell me about your tribe," he said.

João told him, naturally, the things that were dominating impulses in his life.

"With the thin cloth that Kariwa has promised to give me in exchange for my labor my woman will make covers for our hammocks so that the vampire bats do not get at us while we sleep, like these scars here, and here. And the little round box with the glass in which a man can see his face I will give to the *ipa-ge* as a present, so that his word will be with me when chiefs are chosen. And with the axe head I will make me a canoe."

Not a word about the manners and customs of his tribe, the things that an ethnologist wanted to know. But every ethnologist knows that natives will never tell about their manners and customs. Any connected thought about such unconscious habits is hindered by their

sheer inability to understand that everybody else does not understand.

But that would come. Living amongst them in amity and quiet, Dave would observe the little daily chores of their lives, the absorbing intimate things, and would ask how and why and they would tell him; and Dave would bargain with cloth and fish hooks and empty pickle bottles for their artifracts, and they would haggle a whole day over ten cents worth of trade and half the village would come to help and everybody would have a marvelous time. That would be real collecting.

João told him more of the things that were dominant in his mind.

"All the crew will take axe heads for their labor and with them they will make canoes. Only one man of the crew, instead of an axe, will take the tool that makes long holes in wood with which to make blow guns. And they will lend their tools to the other young men to make many more canoes and blow guns, and Kariwa will then lead our people to make a war upon the Big Nose men."

"Hunh!" Dave's pencil scored a dark diagonal scratch in his note book. He stared at João's calm assurance. "A war! So that's what you think?"

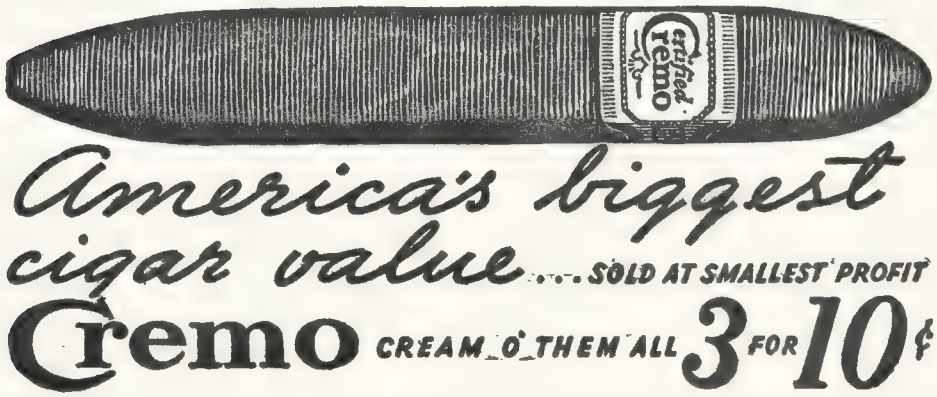
"Yes." João's conviction was absolute. "The *ipa-ge* who rules the drum always said that such a white man would come to deliver our people from the oppression of the Big Nose."

"Oh! He did? Listen, João." Dave tapped law with his forefinger on the man's knee. "All the *ipa-ges* of all peoples have always said that. It's the universal myth of the superman deliverer. Every religion of every oppressed people has it. But that isn't me, my friend. I'm here to collect for a museum."

João only grinned at him. "That is a talk that we of the rivers cannot understand. Men come to the rivers, and the rivers decide what the men will do. All men know that. And the *ipa-ge* spoke truth. He said that a great man would come who would not fear the Big Nose. And here you are."

THE *igarape* of the water cows was just another hole in the wall of jungle. A thousand such had been passed. Nobody knew, until he had explored, how far they went or what caused them. Some were abrupt little channels that ended in a mud bank within a hundred feet—nobody knew why. Others wound on, sluggish and mysterious, for a hundred miles into the unknown.

The crew unlashed their round-bladed paddles from the poles that made oars of them. They chanted an invocation to the *ipa* of their home creek and headed into the hole that looked like any other dark shadow in the sun-drenched green. And suddenly Dave was in another world.



In the jungle—*inside* of it. He had never seen the jungle before. He had seen only the outside wall of it from the broad, glaring river.

Now he was in a tunnel, dim and dark, where the sun never came. He realized all at once the immense wetness of the inner jungle, the permanent humidity that seeped into a man's clothes, that rusted his guns, that grew fungus on his leather boats, that got into his bones.

Everything dripped. It hadn't rained for three weeks, yet droplets of wetness oozed from the solid mat of green overhead to collect themselves into bigger drops that plopped intermittently upon lower growing lush green things that never knew a direct rain.

Liana vines like ropes reached down to find root hold in the wetness and suck it all up again.

João balanced himself at the boat's prow with a machete to hack through those that had grown since his last passing a bare month ago. That was how you know how long ago the last canoe had passed—by the height of the cut ends above the brown water.

Rich dark brown the water was. Not muddy—there was no current to stir up the mud. Brown with root saps and rotting vegetation that made of the whole jungle floor one vast compost heap and tingled your nostrils with that unforgettable dank ammoniac swell of deadness and decay.

There was no life. Life was two hundred feet above where the sun came. The high-pitched cough of toucans and the grating squawk of macaws filtered down to prove that life and brilliant color existed.

Down here everything was dim green and stifling still, sweating wetness where no wind ever stirred. Only the swish and plop of the falling drops. That was the voice of the inner jungle, its wet whisper that, drop by relentless drop, wore away men's souls.

João pointed ahead with the machete. The tunnel was emerging into an irregular arch of light.

"There will be meat," João said. "And meat we have not eaten in nearly four weeks. Only farina and fish, which is no strong food for men who will fight."

The light was the graveyard of a jungle giant that had come to the end of its few hundred years and had finally mightily crashed with all its parasite tangle of vines, tearing a great hole in the sky for the sun to come through; and immediately life blazed in all its tropic clash of color.

Orchids clung to exposed branches; butterflies as big as plates flapped slowly across the opening. Parrots sped in their straight line like bullets. The whole jungle woke up and screamed, cursing man.

João pointed quickly to where lithe black forms jumped up and down on all fours like devils on a grid.

"Spider monkeys. The best meat of all the jungle. Let Kariwa not miss, for his bullets will be needed for the war. And not any that will fall into the water."

Dave didn't miss. Not on account of João's war, but because that was one of the things he had so meticuously studied for years before his big chance came.

All the rest of the jungle within range of the shots screamed rage and warning. All the furtive, hidden creatures.

Birds squawked and whistled their shrill alarms. Strange arboreal beasts, whose voices Dave did not know, gibbered and chattered. Far troops of monkeys took up the clamor and howled the warning farther.

Like echoes amongst mountains the voices spread out and were flung back and died in their querulous cluckings and a final shrill wail of something.

Dave was overwhelmed with a sense of having committed sacrilege, and of the voices of a world raised in protest. The *batelão* slid into the dim dead tunnel again.

JOÃO'S village appeared suddenly where another hole in the sky showed that it was falling dusk outside. Quite a big village. Four *malokas*, tribal houses, loomed against the thin stars. Great barracks they were, of split palm trunk walls and high peaked roofs, a hundred feet long and nearly as wide. Each one would house eighty or so families.

"Golly!" Dave thrilled. "Community Indians! Communism in its original inception. And since they possess nothing that each man can't make for himself, and have no money, it works. Here's where I make good!"

But another thing that Dave had not gotten out of his books was that uneventful security was not so easy to find in the jungle. With tomorrow João pushed his way through the throng of men, women, and children who squatted on the bank to stare at the first white man's *batelão* that had ever come to their village and to giggle at the white man's strange ceremonial of toilet.

As a matter of unimportant news João announced:

"There is another white man."

"Hey?" Dave was startled. He was already learning that white men in the upper rivers meant complications. "Where?"

"He is in a new small house a day's journey up the big river."

"How? Why? Who?" Dave had to put each specific question to get any information.

"He came from still farther up with another white man. The other white man has disappeared. He stays because he has a hurt leg and cannot travel alone."

"Gosh! Who is he? D'you know?"

"We of this village do not know this man, but the talk amongst the big river *malocas* is that he used to be at the balata *sitio* before the Thick Nose came and drove him away. It was thought that he was dead."

Dave's lips pinched and he frowned into the green distance. "I wonder if that would be Vargas Holm? And Rabeira promises that, if he isn't dead he will be—João, we'll have to go get that man, before Rabeira hears about him."

"He will not hear, Kariwa. Nothing of the drum talk is ever told to the Big Nose men. Moreover, in three nights, when the moon will have come to the end of its starvation and died, will be the dance of the young men with whips to frighten away the *Jurupary* devil. For three days they will dance, to show that they are strong. And then the *ipa-ges* will come from all the villages to take Kariwa into the tribe as our friend and deliverer. It has been talked with the drum and agreed."

It broke Dave's heart. A crippled white man! Alone! And with the grisly chance of a Big Nose foray up the big river—likely enough in pursuit of himself when downriver drew blank.

"We'll have to get him," he said.

"But, Kariwa, it is the turn for the men of the crew to clear ground for the new mandioca planting."

"We've got to get that man." Dave was moved by a stubborn insistence that he didn't altogether understand. A man was to be rescued from Thick Nose Rabeira, and anything to be rescued from Rabeira was shaping up almost as important as collecting manners and customs.

João accepted the order stoically.

"Men make plans," he said. "But it is the river and the jungle that decide what men must do." And he found a certain compensation. "Kariwa will be a very strong leader for the war."

SO the long crawl through the tunnel had to be negotiated again; and the same parrots and two-toed sloths and tree ant-eaters screamed and moaned and chattered at them as they passed the sunlit hole in the sky. But not the same

monkeys. The monkeys went very quietly and hid.

Then the open river and the sun glare and oars. Dave had more than one uneasy thought, looking back, wondering what might be coming up the wide highway where there was no hiding.

"How are we going to find this man?" He consulted with João. "He won't be so dumb as to have his hut in full view."

"The talk is that the house is hidden in the jungle. But I will call, and men of the river will come out and tell us.

At intervals, then, João leaned acrobatically over the side and cupped his hands to his mouth close over the water's surface. The pulsating call that he emitted reminded Dave of nothing so much as the booming cry of a bittern.

"The spirits of the water will catch the sound and carry it," João said, "in return for a bargain that the *ipa-ges* make with them. But the spirits of the jungle won't bargain for anything, being evil. In that way the talk of the drum is carried always along the *igarapes*."

"So?" Dave scribbled in his note book. "Sound projected through a windless tunnel. That's plain smart. Tell me, João, how far can the drum be heard?"

João shrugged. "Only the *ipa-ges* know. But it is said that they can talk with the drum as far as a day's journey."

"And that," Dave noted, "is plain exaggeration."

Still, João's bittern call was heard far enough. Furtive men shot out from dark hidie holes in tiny canoes of such insignificant freeboard that their bodies seemed to be sitting upright in the empty water. Their skill of balance and handling was uncanny. They came alongside and grunted long bursts back and forth and ended always by gaping at Dave with round wide eyes.

Dave felt that he was being shown off. But João reported always:

"We will come to the white man presently. He will make himself known to us."

But something went wrong with the communications where the *ipa-ges* were not to hand with their signal system. The white man made himself suddenly known when a rifle thumped from the jungle fringe.

A curiously dull thump. The bullet fell low. Just below where Dave was standing, scanning the bank through glasses, it smacked into the thick mahogany strake of the *batelão*.

Dave yelled, "Hey, don't shoot!" and waved his empty hands above his head. João yelled. The crew yelled. No other shot came. So the *batelão* headed hesitantly in. Then the man was discernible, a crouching figure behind a pile of debris left by the high water.

He waited, motionless, as the *batelão* came in—with a desperate sort of intensity, Dave thought. And then, as he waded ashore, the man drew a much worn machete and crouched defensively.

He was what was left of a big frame, gaunt, his tangled beard just turning gray. He crouched, Dave could see, on one good leg, the other steadying him.

Dave stood away, as from a cornered wolf. It was in the man's burning eyes that just one little misapprehension as to motive would bring him scuttling to a mad last charge. But Dave's tone was eager—he didn't know why.

"Are you Vargas Holm?"

"And if so, what?" The man's tone was grimly the opposite of Dave's.

"Well, I'm very glad to meet you." Dave said rather foolishly.

The man grunted a question at João in the Tamari dialect. João accompanied a barrage of grunts with the same gestures he had used to the Indians in the canoes.

The man shoved his machete back into its sheath and the grim defensiveness went out of his face.

"So you are this deliverer that all the river has been chattering about for the last few days." He took stock of Dave and nodded. "Yes, I'm Holm."

"What deliverer?" Dave was irritated at this crazy reputation that was being thrust upon him. "I'm an ethnologist. I'm here to do Indian research in this section."

The man smiled. It made him look very tired.

"You are new to the jungle. You will learn, young man." He repeated João's insistent acceptance of a law of nature. "Man proposes his various plans in the jungle, and the jungle disposes." His smile went bitter. "As I learned."

Dave laughed, but uneasily.

Holm swayed on his feet. "I'm glad I missed you. It was my last cartridge anyhow, and nearly four years in this climate hadn't done it any good. The moment I heard its bang I knew it would fall low. You're pretty near Rabeira's size, and I knew it would be my last chance."

"You thought I was the Thick Nose! God forbid!"

Holm's grim smile broke through his beard tangle.

"Ha! He still has it, yes?"

"You mean his smashed nose? Yes. Something smeared it over all his face and, without any surgeon to fix it, it grew like that."

"Ah!" Holm grinned wanly. "I gave it to him."

"You did? So that accounts for some of his hate. What happened?"

Holm shrugged wearily. "The old story of the Upper Rivers. We were developing balata, and there was good money in sight. So one day Rabeira jumped us with a gang. I bashed him, and he shot me in the leg. But three of us managed to get away. The rest, five were macheted, and one—" The words were bitten through close teeth. "We never knew."

THERE was nothing dramatic about the recital. Just that bare outline of facts, past and so accepted. Dave found himself, too, regarding them with the aloofness of old history.

"And I suppose you've been trapped up here ever since?"

"Yes. That's one reason for Rabeira's elaborate precautions. I'm flattered. Though there were a few other fellows up here who wouldn't join up with him, egret plume and jaguar hunters—if they haven't died or gone crazy and tried to cut their way through the jungle to a point lower down. I don't know. I've been away."

"Why crazy to try and cut through?"

Holm shrugged. "You've seen it. A rubber path, to go and come, is stiff enough. But travel! The only roads are the rivers. A man can't carry his kit and enough food and swing a machete all day and make more than four miles. Fever or poisonous bugs get him before he can get anywhere—and now Indians. The Indians used to be all right around here, but not since Rabeira came to teach them white ethnology."

"Meaning manners and customs?" Dave wondered at the man's cold ability to make a jest of the thing. "He has a flawless school of hate there."

"To the hurt of every other white man in the land." Holm shrugged his acceptance of that as to every other contingency of the jungle's normal way. "So we tried to work our way on up and over the mountains. But Jorgens—that was my wife's brother—he couldn't stick it and he died, and I can't get around so well with this leg. So we had to come back. And then the other man—he had his guts, that man. He thought if he could escape past the *sitio* and get on down to Manaos, he could get the church to jack up the governor to really do something. That was the Padre Ignacio."

"Ignacio?" Dave felt the hot blood surge up into his temples. "So that's how Father Ignacio got caught!"

"Ah!" Holm showed neither grief nor even surprise. "So Padre Ignacio didn't get through?"

"No." Dave knew suddenly how men could hate Rabeira of the Thick Nose. "Father Ignacio brought no information to the governor. And—" The memory of the loss was a physical anguish—"he took information with him that men have spent a hundred years to learn and that only he knew."

"Ah!" Holm was as apathetic as any Indian. "Tell me about it."

All of Dave's muscles contracted in a sudden qualm.

"Come on back to the boat." he said. "Let João tell you. Let's get away from here before our luck turns."

"Vargas Holm's expression remained unreadable behind his tangle of hair and beard while João grunted his primitive gutturals and manipulated the big steering oar with his foot to leave his hands free for supplementary pantomime. Then he relapsed into the long silence of a man who had been much alone. Once he asked Dave, almost as though to make conversation:

"Could it be possible that you might have any cartridges to fit my gun?"

"Winchester four-five, isn't it? Yes," Dave said. "I read it was about the standard in most of Amazonas, and passed as money. So I brought along quite a supply for trade."

"Ah!" Said Holm. And after another long scrutiny of the passing jungle, he concluded: "Very good."

Almost at the end of the down river run Holm asked him again: "You were up to the house. Did you see anything, hear anything about—a white woman?"

"Yes I did." The memory of that grotesque dinner table came back to Dave. "Rabeira spoke of one."

"Ah!" Vargas Holm said. He barked a staccato noise that might have been an ironic laugh. "*We* built no defenses round the sitio. We thought we were secure from any trouble with savages.

He chewed his lip on his silence, and then said in a quite normal voice: "She was my wife."

And then they were in the dim tunnel of the igarape of water cows again.

CHAPTER IV

LAIR OF THE JAGUAR

AS the *batelão* emerged from the jungle tunnel to João's village axes were heard where they had never been before. Long logs lay in the clearing. Sturdy naked men were hacking at them, shaping their ends. Little fires burned in long rows on their upper surfaces, charring the wood for easier gouging; small boys kept them glowing hot with palm leaf fans.

Holm grated his laugh. "Nice looking lot of Indians, no? And friendly. Sturdy youngsters too. The only village for a hundred miles that hasn't been raided by friend Da Costa as yet. A people worth saving, no? His laugh was cynical. "Or do you still think, my dear man of science, that things in glass cases are worth more than people?"

The *batelão* was moored close to the bank, broadside on. Dave sat in a canvas camp chair on the thwart. He looked ridiculous and he knew it. Around the crown of his broad felt hat had been woven an exquisite chaplet of tiny yellow and scarlet toucan cheek feathers. Streamers of tail feathers hung from the corners of the chair. Vargas Holm crouched on the floor boards at a level below his knees. Grave old men decorated with similar chaplets round their foreheads squatted on the bank and waited on his word.

They were *ipa-ges* from six different villages. Amongst them was the ruler of the drum.

Dave was not asking which one or what was his code. Gravely the old men pushed forward a youth who had been foolishly brave enough to carry an ultimatum to Rabeira, a strongly built young man whose one ear was a

raw stump. With the astounding dumb fortitude of a savage to whom savagery was his accepted lot the man tendered a bloody packet of banana leaf and a fold of brown wrapping paper and reported:

"They said I was to bring Kariwa the ear and the writing on paper."

Dave's lips pinched tight to swallow down the upheaval of his stomach. It was not necessary, he knew, to open the banana leaf packet; the man's report was so savagely unequivocal. That had been Dave's mistake, due to inexperience. Books didn't teach the depth of savagery.

"Give the man a machete," he told Holm.

Holm reached into the cabin and handed out a broad new blade.

The old men nodded and muttered: "It is generous, but just."

The young man took the feel of the blade into his hands and swung it. The slow grin on his face seemed to indicate that he agreed it was generous.

Dave scanned the wrapping paper note and reported to the old men.

"Thick Nose's reply is that, first, he laughs and says, send no more messengers; and second, that if we deliver this white man to him, I may go my way free and there will be no punishment of the men and women whom they hold in their corral. What then, Old Wise Ones, is the word?"

The *ipa-ges* grunted together.

"But our people would remain undelivered and the Thick Nose would remain lord of the river."

"So what is the word?"

"He must be driven out. Many of our young men will die, but by their death the community will live."

"It is the agreed word, then. All right. Go and send the signal out that the Thick Nose will be driven from his place. And send João."

Dave scowled into the peaceful distanee. He was learning to shrug to the inevitable.

"So it'll have to be fight."

"These people have expected it all along," said Holm.

"It was a mistake to send that poor devil with an ultimatum."

"I told you. We should have jumped them unexpectedly."

"But damn it, we had to give them some sort of a warning."

"The inhibitions of civilization," said Holm, "are always a handicap where civilization doesn't exist."

João came and squatted.

"How many canoes are ready, João? Never mind about details of finish. How many men will they transport?"

But João was not to be diverted from literal detail. He counted on his finger joints, a queer duo-decimal system that used the thumb to mark down each unit

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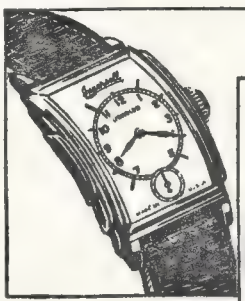

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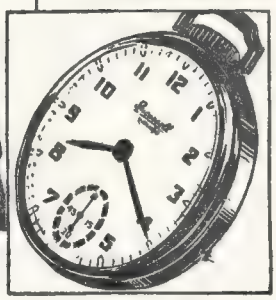

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of twelve. Dave's eyes sparkled momentarily on the counting.

"Four thumbs and a half a thumb of two-man canoes, Kariwa, and six joints of three-man canoes. They will carry six handfuls of men. And perhaps three thumbs of canoes will come from other villages. That will be all the canoes in all the villages. There used to be many more, but since the Big Nose men came many villages have left their *malocas* empty and have gone to far places where white men do not go."

"Yeh!" Dave said viciously. "That's what professors back home write books about and call tribal migrations and the march of civilization. That'll mean about a hundred naked Indians armed with trade knives and blow guns and what-have-you. Haul out that machete crate, Holm."

Dave looked at it and grated a laugh.

"There's half a gross of American-made Collins machetes that were going to buy my way up and down the back creeks, collecting Indian artifracts. Take them up to the council *maloka*, João. They will be the property of the village and will be distributed to those men who are most apt in their use."

Holm pointed his jungle-taught philosophy of hard fact.

"You are buying live men with them instead of dead artifracts."

"Live men? This will be a bloody business. They have twenty white men with rifles, behind a stockade. And what force have we?"

Holm chuckled. He was full of cynical good humor these days. "We have the sublime force of a struggle for liberty. You, American, ought to understand that. Rabeira's gang took a shot at you and you took a shot at them. Because blood has flowed you, just as much as me and these Indians, are up to our necks in a blood feud with that gang. And you, if you ever do any more collecting, will never get out of this jungle as long as Rabeira controls the road."

Dave shrugged as high as any Latin.

"All right, João. I want you to describe this *sitio*."

João was as literal as a map and as lucid.

"It is this, Kariwa. The river front Kariwa has seen; the hill with its palisade of palm trunks having holes for men to shoot. Upriver, at the foot of the little hill, is a broad creek, the Igarape Sombra for which the *sitio* is named. Along that water's edge is a high palisade, higher than on the hill. Behind the *sitio* the igarape grows out of a swamp in which are caimans as long as a three-man canoe.

"It is a two-day journey round the swamp. Therefore the only way to that we're only just finding out."

"And in front," said Dave succinctly, "is the machine-gun.

"Yes, Kariwa. The gun that talks like a drum. And the little house with a wheel in it, with which they pull up a chain across the river at night."

Dave looked at Holm.

"There's one man who had no delusions about security from Indians, or anybody else. He's left nothing to fond chance. It sounds impregnable."

"Meaning he is afraid," Holm said, and laughed at him.

Dave cursed him viperishly. To João he said: "It is settled. Take the word to the *ipa-ges*. Let the drum signal the other villages to come in. Let the dance of the bravery medicine begin."

CAAPI. "The medicine that makes men brave." For three days the young men had been dancing to show their strength and stamina. Forward and backward in an arm-locked circle, contracting and expanding, like the pulse of a single vast heart, stamping their heels down to the earth's center, the home of the ancient earth gods.

For three days canoes had been stealing in with fierce young men decked out

in a finery of feathers that left Northern Indians pale and colorless, for here was the advantage of blazing toucan and macaw plumes. Drummers pounded a rhythm, the sheer repetition of which got into a man's very being and set up a corresponding vibration. Musicians piped on shrill reeds in unison. The whole assembly of warriors, the whole tribe, pulsed to that rhythm as a single cohesive unit.

Holm grinned at Dave. "Pity you're not a scientist any more. This would be great material. Very few white men have ever seen a *caapi* dance."

"Priceless material, with all sorts of meaning to it." Dave swayed to the drum tempo himself. "Mass rhythm psychology. Like congregations in church and community singing and all that. Deep stuff. Makes a fellow wonder how primitive people got these things that we're only just finding out."

The dusk began to come. The faces of the dancers began to grow serious and grim. With darkness they would meet the *Jurupary* devil, the embodiment of all the evil in the jungles, and they would have to fight him to show that they had no fear of the devil or anything else.

All the women and children who had been watching and applauding their men to greater effort were herded into the *malocas* and kept under guard, for only strong men might look upon the *Jurupary* and not go mad.

Serious faced older men, too old to fight, lit fires in a wide circle. Between the fires men squatted holding great gourds of the bravery medicine. The young men shed their finery of feathers, naked down to breech clouts, never breaking the rhythm of their dance, stamping always down to Mother Earth. They merged into the gloom. The fires glinted off the moist high lights of their limbs and reflected red from eyeballs. Shadows stamping in the dark.

Men outside of the ring handed them reed flutes. They danced on and piped, each man its single plaintive note, but always in that all pervading rhythm. Together the soft tones were like birds in the woods.

An old man who squatted next to Dave told him: "Those are the voices of the good spirits. Now," his tone dropped to an awed whisper, "comes the *Jurupary*."

And it came. A deep *bzoom-bzoom* out of the night jungle that overlaid the good spirit voices and crashed a discord against the rhythm of the drums. Dave jarred unpleasantly to it. The dancers broke from the locked arm circle and gyrated singly now. Each man on his own, to meet his devil face to face.

The bzooming horns crashed nearer; and out of the night stepped monstrous young men into the fire flicker. Naked. Painted all black. *Ipa-ges* herded them. They stamped slowly, heavily, to their own discordant rhythm, as though feeling their way by sense of foot alone, though their eyes stared wide and unblinking like in a trance.

"Ow!" the old man mumbled. "Six to choose from. This is a big devil hunting."

Something of the awe that gripped the community seeped into Dave's being. He whispered to the old man. "Who are they? What?"

The old man whispered furtively back under his hand, as one who fearfully mentions the name of the very imminent devil in the dark.

"They will one day be *ipa-ges*. Now they are bodies of evil. For three days the *ipa-ges* have made magic over them in the jungle; and the *Jurupary* himself has taken the man spirit out of one of them and is now in that body. Nobody knows which one. Lesser evil spirits, assistants of the *Jurupary* are in the others."

THE evil spirits advanced heavily into the circle of fires, clumped around amongst the dancers. As one lumbered

nearer to Dave, squatting beyond the fire circle, he noted with a shock that the man was armed with a long sinuous lash like a coach whip.

"Ha! Flagellation. As a manhood test." Dave dissected the primitive human reactions to which he himself was responding. He whispered to Holm as cautiously as the savage on his other side whispered to him. "Hampton reported it. Jarring rhythms building up nerve irritation and desire to fight. Like bagpipes. Very deep stuff."

But this was more than just flagellation. A young man suddenly rushed out from the dim intertwining mass. From a *caapi* tender he snatched a gourd and took a long draught. Muttered applause came from the old men; grunts of encouragement.

The young man danced back, close in and out amongst the lumbering whip carriers. He was choosing his devil. Suddenly he tapped one of the monstrous black forms on the shoulder. For all that he, or anybody else, knew, this one was possessed by the dread *Jurupary* himself, who commanded all the evil and the hazards of the night jungle.

Immediately the other dancers opened out to leave whip space. Dancing always, but the stiff turn of their heads showed how tensely they watched the ordeal. In the flickering dark Dave could positively feel that men held their breaths. The young devil challenger stood and held his arm high, his body naked to the lash. The devil took aim with his whip once, and "Swish!" Dave could hear the vicious hiss of it above the flutes and discordant horns.

But never a wince, never a moan from the young man.

"Aa-ah!" Pent breaths let go. "He is brave, that one. The *Jurupary* cannot subdue him. It is a good medicine."

And then an extraordinary turn-about came. The devil, having done his damnedest, handed his whip to the challenger and stood with arms high. And that burly young man surely put his muscle into trying to fetch a grunt from the devil. If he could, it would mean that he established his ascendancy over the forces of evil and would be safe from them in the jungle. But nobody expected the devil men to wince. Hypnotized, they seemed to be, as they lumbered with their wide staring eyes.

Before Dave's skin ceased to tingle from his own nerve response to the sight, another thin swish cut through the deeper droning of horns and drums. Somewhere in the farther dark another warrior was taking his ordeal.

And then another. A dancer circled near the ring of fires. Dave could see a raised weal as thick as his thumb round the man's naked waist.

"God! Those lads have got guts," he muttered. His nostrils were flaring and his eyes glittering to the sheer dramatic thrill of the spectacle with its pounding drums and discordant horns and shadowy weaving figures in the fire light. It was like watching some grim sort of game that called for moral fortitude as well as physical courage.

"Though maybe the *caapi* drug is some kind of intoxicant and nerve anaesthetic."

"I hope," Holm said, "at least anaesthetic."

"Why?"

Holm looked up at him sideways. With cold practicality that seared through Dave's mind he said:

"This might be your opportunity to step in and give that boost to morale."

Dave stared at him.

"You mean—go in with them?"

Holm nodded. "Big medicine. Their leader. Right in with them in their ordeal. Let them do nothing that he'd be afraid to do himself. Even civilization understands that. It's leader tradition for men who are going to fight—and some of them die."

"God!" Dave's skin crawled. His belt was suddenly a wide protective band

"If they can take it, I can!"

round his waist. Under its quick tightness his pulse pounded with the drums.

"Nothing that a white leader would be afraid to do," Holm repeated. The man was an insidious devil himself.

Another swish came out of the dark, and a moan. Some patriot youth—too young, possibly, or with an undue share of nerves. The *Jurupary* horns blared out in triumph.

"Um-mm-mm!" The squatting tribe moaned all round the ring. If the devil had found one weakling, there could be others.

"Morale!" Holm's voice rasped the long drawn-out last syllable. "If they begin to break now—"

The drums roared out a maddening rhythm that fought the discord of devil horns.

"By God!" Dave was on his feet. "If they can take it, I can." He was tearing off his shirt.

"Ha!" Holm barked. "Good boy! And cheap at the price. There could

be worse things you might have to do. Drink a gallon of it. And for God's sake don't fail now."

DAVE was down to his shorts, naked white in the gloom. He stepped over the fires.

An amazed mutter began among the nearest old men who could see him. To their own warriors they had grunted conventional encouragement. But this was stark drama. An ancient of many past fights yelped excitement and the name of Kariwa. Squatting men craned forward to see. They yelled. Approbation roared round the ring like a trail of gunpowder. The mad drums drowned even the devil horns. Dave found a gourd of the *caapi* pushed into his hands. He lifted it and drank. The ring roared and slapped palms on bare thigh like gun shots. They had no such civilized savagery as a cheer leader, these people; but the drums ruled their perfect tempo.

All that Dave knew about it was that the drink tasted flat and bitter. There was no cold determination about him. He was swept out and beyond sane reasoning by the rhythms that had pervaded his being, jarred by the *bzoom-bzooming,* lifted to exhilaration by the sheer adulation of the crowd. He knew only that he wanted to go in there with the rest of those sturdy lads and fight. If they could, damn it, he could.

A reed flute was in his hand. He blew a reedy blast on it and stamped out as the others stamped. One, two, back, forward, heavy on the fourth. Three times, making twelve. Repeat. He was in for it now. His nostrils twitched. His lips tightened across thinly opened teeth. He breathed heavy out on the fourth, in at twelve.

It was a sudden shock to find a dim black form lumbering near him. It was instinct to dance away. His waist skin was suddenly tingling all round. Other black forms gyrated near. They seemed to be concentrating on him, glimmering white amongst the moving shadows. An insensate pack, dead-eyed and staring.

Vaguely Dave was hoping he would not have to pick the strongest. One, a monstrous black shape, jostled at his elbow. There was no out. Dave slapped it on a shoulder that felt curiously cold to his hand.

The roaring of the crowd dropped away. Only an "Amm-mmu!" of expectancy moaned away in a widening circle. The dancers made room. Dave gripped his teeth and lifted his arms. The looming black thing, who must be the very devil himself, measured his aim. Expressionless. Intent only on his stroke.

"Swish!"

If there was any anaesthetic to the *caapi* drug it was something that didn't affect white skins. Dave's every nerve and muscle shrank tight. He felt his neck swell and his body draw itself up. A horror assailed him that he might have winced. It held him so for an aeon while he quivered.

And then, *"Whau!"* The breaths let go in a roar, and beyond the fires Dave could see old men jumping up and down and slapping thighs.

And then the whip was in his hand. He felt it dully there. He hated to lash that insensate hulk. And suddenly an appalling thought crowded through his surging relief that his ordeal was past.

Good God! There were six of these devil-devils against a hundred stalwart warriors. Each one must take a stroke from every eager warrior who tagged him. They should be cut to pieces. Yet this one seemed to be astoundingly unmarked about the middle, while Dave could feel the red weal swelling round his own waist by the burning second.

Magic was here. Genuine. Something unexplainable, like fire walking. Pity he was not a scientist to investigate that. Only a leader of naked savages, ritually naked with them. A return lash

was ritual. Dave gave it and was again astounded that his own effort with such a weapon, half-hearted as it was, cut no skin.

It was over. Thank God that a man could blast his emotions into a reed whistle and dance away. Dave tooted and stamped in tempo with his brother demon-darers. He made room with the other dancers as other young men tagged their devils. No other young man moaned.

Hours of it. Dim bodies. Glittering eyes. Black devils. Sweat. Drums. Forever the drums. Their rhythm swelled and pervaded over the jarring horns that grew weaker. And then the devil horns, defeated, were receding into the night, fading back to the jungle from where they came.

There were no more lumbering demon shapes. The drum rhythm and the good spirit flutes and the stamping of feet were all knit together in the unison of a whole tribe together. A people in one accord, afraid neither of the devil nor anything else.

Hellish shrieks of parrots said that the dawn was just below the tree tops. Tired young men drifted away to find their hammocks. They made no fuss over Dave. Why should they? He was one of themselves; he played their game with them; as well as they did. And won.

Only Holm, limping beside him as he walked with sore, naked feet to his boat, chuckled cynically.

"You'll probably get hookworm for this. They dig into tender soles. But it was cheap at the price."

"Cheap? I'm going to get sunburn on top of it, where I can't put on a shirt.

"Very cheap. You might have had to risk your life to whoop them up to this pitch of enthusiasm. I tell you they're unbeatable now." Today they'll rest up and tonight they'll drive the oppressor from the land. You couldn't stop them now."

STAR-DARK night again. The young moon, the child of the last one that had died, was not born yet. Dim heads, trunkless, floated on the surface of the river mist. A fantastic ghost fleet, alive only because it moved erratically forward and whispered fiercely.

Heads, tandem in pairs, and sometimes threes, kept eagerly trying to pass the leading line of seven heads in a row. They urged only greater speed to the whispers that ordered them back.

Dave was not by any means eager.

"A hundred and seventeen naked men." His whisper was morosely anxious. "Against twenty rifles behind a stockade! Lord help them!"

Even Holm, face to face with imminent reality at last, was not so confident.

"There'll be some fifty of their balata workers, of course, on the spot. And we sent them the message to steal as many of their work machetes as they could."

"Yeah. How many d'you think Rabeira has left lying around these last days?"

In the roll of the narrow canoe, Dave could feel Holm's deep shrug.

"Some, anyhow. Every one will be a help."

"Will those poor devils dare to do anything while their women are held in the corral?"

"They'll have to." Holm was grim. "If we fail, they're the ones who'll suffer the punishment."

"If only they've had enough courage to rush that damned machine-gun and heave it into the river, like we told them."

"The machine-gun! How much of a fool d'you think Rabeira is, knowing what's been due to break?"

The ghost heads drifted on, floating on the mist. João's head whispered:

"We are at the place, Kariwa. The chain will be not far."

Dave tensed. The thing was here. He felt very helpless and ignorant. He knew

nothing about jungle fighting. This thing called for an experienced filibuster leader—who would probably know too much to attempt it. The old hot wave of resentment surged up in him against this that the jungle had dragged him into. He was no military man; he was an ethmolo— No he wasn't. He was a leader of simple naked men who looked to him to hoist them to the winning of freedom.

"All right, João. Pass the word to edge in to the opposite bank and we'll talk over what is what."

Stealthily the canoes nosed in amongst the great tree roots that stood in the oozy shallows, lukewarm where there was no current. With astonishing silence they edged in, by feel alone in the dark.

A splash and a rush jerked a tense curse of "Damn the fool!" from Holm. But further splashing and the gurgling suck of a miniature whirlpool over the drive of a great tail told that it was only a disturbed caiman.

Voices murmured. "That will tell them that vengeance is here." Fierce glee was in the tones. Paddles began to dip. Appallingly away from the bank, out in the stream.

Dave's blood emptied out from him and left his diaphragm dropping away into vacancy.

"Hey! Get back there! Call them back, João! We can't rush this. Lord, what fools!"

But more canoes began to slip away. Vengeance, long delayed, burned too hot for cold caution.

"Like I said, you can't hold them," Holm rasped. "All courage and no brains. That's where discipline always wins. Come on. We'll have to organize on that bank now."

Then a voice on that bank laughed. "*Selvages estupidos.* Stupid savages," it derided. "Make them eat it, *amigo.*"

A thick voice growled: "Am I to shoot mist? I can't see a thing."

"Mist certainly, fool. At half a meter high, and spread it. You'll send something to hell."

THE heart stunning racket of the machine-gun roared into the night. Shrieks came out of the blind mist. Bullets crashed amongst the tree roots. The hammer of steel spraying wood crackled away over a sector of the bank, then crackled roaring back.

Shooting blind in the dark. But low over the water at half a meter it couldn't fail to hit something. Like a devilish live something, stabbing in the dark, it felt its way and concentrated where shrieks answered it most.

Silence tingled in Dave's ears after the uproar. Only furtive shufflings were in the dark about him as men found shelter. But out in the stream shrieks rose again and hideous long dragging bubbly yells. For only a second Dave wondered, and then a vast splashing and the slap of great tails on roiled water seared his mind with a picture of upset canoes and of men whose ill fate it was not to have been mercifully cut in half. One gurgling scream seemed to be in the grip of something not big enough to drag and hold it under. It bubbled horribly away and rose again, hoarsely strangling, farther downstream, and bubbled down in froth, and repeated, fainter and farther.

Hurtling canoes began to bump in amongst the roots. Dripping forms, panting great gasps, began to lift themselves out of the mist.

And then the gun was loaded again and its terrifying racket raged up and down the bank.

When no more shrieks answered it, it stopped.

Holm's voice shivered out of the dark.

"The thing has got us licked. Rifles were tough enough to consider. But they, at least, have to see what to shoot. This hellish thing can cut a fleet

in half, firing blind. No morale can face that."

"Not even discipline. A bad beginning, this." Dave sweated in impotence. "I wish we could see how the poor devils are taking it— No I don't, though. Then the gun could see, and that would be the finish. We'll have to stop that gun. That's our only hope."

As though literally advised by the devil to disturb coherent thought the gun roared out a short random burst. The vicious tearing of hot steel through wood fiber was terrifying. Somebody, insufficiently sheltered from the thing's awful penetration, yelled. It was nerve-shattering, the way that thing could seek out and kill in the dark.

"It would shoot over the head of a man swimming." Dave said.

"It would. But you heard what happens to men swimming. Think smarter than that."

"I'm thinking."

"God help you think fast. I can't."

"Come on." Dave said tightly.

"You crazy? Where?"

"Upriver a bit. To swim. João. Where's João? Tell the men, João, to keep well hidden and to be strong of heart. The white men go to make a magic."

CHAPTER V

VENGEANCE TRAIL

IT WAS Providence's benevolence to a desperate cause that the underbrush along the river's edge, where the water rose and fell with the rains, was not as thick as the inner jungle. Dave was able to feel his way amongst the huge trees. At intervals he felt bodies.

"Be of strong heart," he exhorted them. "Come on, Holm."

Behind them the gun roared intermittent bursts at where the voices had been. Presently Dave risked his flashlight.

"Now to get a fat caiman," he told Holm. His voice was shivery with a mad excitement. "I guess you'll be better at night shooting than me. I'll flash its eyes. And see that you get it dead."

"Yes, you can flash their eyes like a frog," Holm said. "But what madness are you planning?"

"Get it dead, that's all. I'll show you."

Holm's shot tore half the head off the brute that stared stupidly at the white beam.

Far below them the machine-gun rattled startled response.

"Your animal anatomy will be better than mine," Dave said. "I'll hold the light and you rip me out its fatty musk glands."

Holm understood none of it, but he obeyed the force that dominated Dave just as Dave was obeying it, understanding very little of it himself.

"Will you tell me this madness?" Holm grunted as he hacked into the leathery neck hide. "Pah! Does it stink!"

Dave surprised himself that he was able to laugh, even though through teeth so set that his words hissed.

"This," he croaked, "is at least one good thing out of books. Sharnholtz reports it."

He took handfuls of the nauseating fat and smeared it over his clothes, his canvas shoes, even his hands and face.

"Caimans," he lectured, "aren't cannibalistic. They don't attack what stinks like themselves. Otherwise no little caimans would ever grow up. I'm going to swim for it."

"*Defendeme Deus!* I think you're mad."

Dave laughed again, madly. "When an observer as accurate as Scharnholtz reports it, I'll take the chance. Good Lord, I've got to. It's the only chance there is."

Holm's eyes glimmered at him, owlish out of the dark.

"Mad. And if the caimans don't get you, what?"

"I'll jump the gun crew. They won't be expecting it." Dave tore his handkerchief and slung his machete, bare, to hang down his back. "Go along back and tell the men I'm pulling a magic stunt. Make it big. Jack up the old morale. And if I—when I make it and I holler, bring 'em over with a rush."

He waded softly into the water.

"Mad," Holm muttered. "Heroically mad. But so were they all. All the deliverers."

Holm's body jerked in a galvanic shiver.

"God help you make it." Suddenly his voice squeaked in a strangled yelp. "Wait! *Cristo Salvador!* What about the piranhas?"

Dave's voice came grimly out of the mist.

"That's one other good thing out of b o o k s. Piranhas aren't nocturnal. They're daylight feeders. And I'm fully dressed anyhow—and they don't attack caiman."

DAVE swam with a silent breast stroke. The mad excitement that had lifted him to his desperate resolve chilled away to cold tremors out at his feet. The impulse to snatch them up close was a sharp pain on bitten lips. Scharnholtz had reported seeing it done, yes. But could that have been a freak happening? The impulse to race ahead in a wide surge of overhand splashing was a frenzy. But no, Scharnholtz would have made a supplementary note if he hadn't been sure. Dave tasted the sickening musk from his bitten lip and swam steadily.

As a swim it was nothing. And Scharnholtz was splendidly right. Nothing happened. Dave heard the interminable clicking of the *sitio* palm stems in the night breeze. Thank God for that. It would cover inevitable little splashings of his own. He drifted in the mist. If he could only know just where to land now.

Suddenly the gun slammed out a furious burst. Dave could hear the steam of steel shriek over his head. To duck was immediate instinct, but he came immediately up again. His head was many inches below the line of fire. The steel stream sprayed above him in an arc and back. He felt exultingly aloof. They weren't even dreaming of aiming at him. So close. At that distance he could distinguish the glow of the flame through the mist. And thank God again for that.

He inched himself out of the water. His breath was hissing again through close-bitten teeth. Above the mist layer he could distinguish the dim outline of a low parapet of what must be logs. That would be where the gun was sheltered. Hope to God. He would have to be sure.

The same Providence that furthered a desperate cause stayed with him. Voices came from behind the parapet. Easy voices, conversing in careless security. There seemed to be three of them. Suspecting nothing. How should they?

Dave knew nothing about attacking machine-gun nests. But he had read in his books about single men rushing a barrier and jumping down into a trenchful of startled enemies with just a clumsy bayonet—and emerging alive.

No soldier, he had always thought a machete to be a much more horrible weapon than a bayonet. He reached his machete round from his back. His lips drew away from his teeth in a tense inhalation. He rushed the barrier and jumped. The enemies were paralyzingly startled. That was the whole trick of the thing.

Dave landed on soft shadows that yelled sudden afright. In a frenzy of fear himself, he hacked at them. They shrieked and rolled. Dave hacked at every dim thing that moved. They shrieked again. Dave rushed at a crouching shadow and hewed it down.

From the stockade a voice shouted:

"Hey! *Que faz?* What goes on down there?"

Nothing more rolled and shrieked about Dave's feet.

The voice came again.

"Que faz?"

Dave fought his voice steady.

"Um serpente," he called back. "But it is killed. All right now." Then he cupped his hands and shouted over the river. "All right! Come on!"

Shouts floated back. The rush of canoes into water and furious paddles. Then the voice from above again.

"All right. I come. *Hola, amigos,* some of you. Something is wrong down there."

Footsteps began to fumble their way down the hill. Single footsteps in advance. Dave crouched motionless beside the gun. Scuffling steps were farther back. And Dave distinctly heard the rusty squeak of a hurricane lantern glass being lifted. A match flared. A furious voice snarled:

"No light, fool! They have rifles over there!"

The first footsteps shuffled nearer. A shadow loomed and growled:

"What the thousand devils is all this here?"

Dave rushed it. That one didn't even shriek.

The other footsteps were almost down to the beach. How many? Dave's stomach crawled. His swing that had been so effective on that last one had been waist high. Shadows loomed close, grumbling.

Canoes grated on the beach. Shadows lifted out of the white mist and rushed, yelling. Dave threw himself from their immediate path. The grumbling voices yelled. Shrieked. More canoes. More yelling shadows. More shrieks.

Shouts came from the stockade above. Rifle shots. Somebody yelled again.

Dave rushed in amongst his own shadows, shouted, shoved on shoulders.

"Down! Flat, you fools! Find cover. Spread out! João! Where's João?"

Holm was scuttling at his side.

"Boy, you did it!" he babbled. "A magic, you told them. A miracle! Boy, you made good!" Nothing can stop them now!"

YELLING men began to rush up the hill. Dave raged amongst them. Shouting, yelling himself once more, catching at running shadows. Holm with him. João, without understanding, but loyally obedient, shouting orders of recall.

But discipline was a word that naked men had never heard. That was the trouble. You couldn't stop them.

They rushed up the hill and surged at the stout poles of the stockade. A mob, yelling, howling.

And history repeated. Rifles spat from behind shelter that matchetes could not hew down. Screaming men boosted each other over the top, and modern pistols met them.

Naked men began to come back down the hill. Bleeding, many of them. How many would never come nobody could tell till tomorrow's sorry reckoning. Then a broken rush of men, ready at last to take cover.

Triumphant shouts came from the stockade. Sporadic rifle shots.

"And now what?" Dave gasped. "The fools! The poor silly, plucky fools! Now what? If we can't think of something to hoist them over the top now—tonight—they're sunk. They'll never again accumulate the morale to win their freedom. And I've got no more magic up my sleeve."

"I suppose you couldn't use that machine-gun," Holm said. "That would be another miracle."

"Of course not. You?"

"I could study it out with light to see by."

"Yeh, with light for rifles to pick us off. Darkness is our only chance, and we've got to do whatever we do quickly, before daylight."

Furtive men began to steal down the hill. Balata workers. Frightened. Some of them did have stolen machetes. But, only faintly hopeful before the fighting started, now they were demoralizing.

"Damnation! We've got to do something," Dave fretted. "Got any ideas? We've got to stop these fellows croaking about their *masters*. Think, man. You're the brains of this. You know conditions. I'm empty. For God's sake think fast before daylight."

More furtive balata workers drifted down. With pathetic hopelessness they mumbled to Kariwa to do something.

"We cannot run away. Our women. We tried to free them. They would have fought with teeth and empty hands and broken sticks, for they know what punishment will be. But the Thick Nose caught the man who was loosening the posts of the corral door and cut him down."

Holm's old laugh suddenly rasped out. "*Deus!* I've got the idea! Quick! You, men, your machetes. Gather machetes!"

Dave's hope soared again at Holm's excitement. "What now?"

"The women. They'll fight. There's half a hundred of them in there! Heave 'em weapons over the wall. Machetes, you men! Collect machetes! Dave, boy, you stage a demonstration this side to cover any noise. I'm going round back. Machetes! Machetes!"

HOLM scuttled away into the darkness. His confidence swept over Dave. That was the trick. A diversion inside would give his men a chance to storm the palisade. He explained to João. João crept away. Men began to creep around Dave.

"No mad rushing now." He whispered the same monotonous instructions to each separate man. "You know now that you cannot climb a stockade against guns. We do not fight yet. We make a noise. Go, you ten, and commence a noise. When fighting will commence with the women we attack in three groups at three places together; at the gate and at each corner. Thus some will certainly get over. Is it understood?

He went amongst them, herding them into groups, impressing exactly upon each its simple rôle, in the hope of achieving some sort of concerted action.

It took time. It took patience to explain concerted action to naked savages. And so, long before Dave was nearly satisfied that they understood, an uproar commenced within the stockade.

A shout first. A blow. A woman's scream. Oaths. And then a horrible screeching.

And, of course, there was no concerted action. Naked men rushed up the hill as badly as before. Only, this time, no tongues of red fire stabbed out at them. The shots that sounded were inside. Confusion and fury were inside. Men shouted in rage, swore in incredulous amazement; called suddenly on the name of God in panic. Their voices were cut off in screams. Shots were followed by screams—man-screams. And over all the uproar was the horrible screeching of furies.

No shots came to blast howling men who boosted each other over the palisade. Dave found a shadowy back, hoisted himself, got a finger hold on the top, and over.

Inside were hurricane lanterns; enough for the defenders to see their doings. But there were no defenders. Only desperate men fighting silently now to save themselves from clinging mobs of women who clawed and bit and screeched, and hacked at things on the ground.

And then waves of naked men over the top who howled and dragged at women to stand away from further hurt and let the men finish it, and women who screeched the more furiously and wouldn't be dragged from their long laid-up vengeance.

Dave rushed amongst them. He shouted, dragged at their arms. Those who

attended to him at all only turned furious faces for a moment and turned immediately back to the good work in hand. Dave screamed for Holm to help.

"We've got to stop this slaughter!" he screamed. And it sounded very futile and silly.

And then the drum came. Close somewhere it boomed and thundered out of the jungle. The scrambling, clawing mass of men and women screamed and the air-shaking vibrations of the drum built it up and multiplied it.

Holm was dragging at Dave's arm.

"Vengeance! That's what it says. And neither you nor I can stop it. Come away! Out! Let's get out." He dragged Dave with him from the stockade.

"My God!" Dave's voice was hoarse. "I didn't realize this. I thought we'd capture the place and chase out the survivors. Had an idea, as a matter of fact, we'd take them to Manáos and hand them over to justice."

"Ah!" Holm was the grimly humorous cynic of yesterday. "You thought perhaps the Manáos courts were swifter or surer than those of your own country? My friend, let me tell you they are getting justice now."

"Yes but—Good Lord, Holm—"

Holm's cold repression fell from him; he turned fiercely on Dave. "You don't know what any of it means. You haven't suffered. As they have all these years. As I have. As my wife—" His voice choked on his rage. He swallowed it down and held a great breath and was calm once more.

"But let that go. It's past history, and they're paying for the condition they made. They're getting justice. Primitive and straight as God Almighty made it. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. And neither you nor I can stop it. It's been their rule that people don't interfere with what happens here. They made it. They're eating it. The story is finished."

Dave walked on with Holm in silence. Without conscious volition their steps stumbled downhill to the river. Dave frowned out across the clean white mist.

"Finished," he said. "But a new story beginning. It's a good river and they're a good people. And you've made good and I've made good. It remains to make the name of white men good."

SO Dave sat again in his *batelão,* looking ridiculous with a chaplet of feathers round his hat, and Holm sat with him, and grave old men squatted on the bank to discuss the conduct of important events.

"This, then, is the proposal," Dave said. "That four handfuls of men from this village and three handfuls from the smaller villages, when their turn to labor in the fields comes, go to labor in the balata. What is the word?"

"It is agreed," the old men said.

"Splendid," said Holm. "All we need is an assured labor supply, and watch us spread."

"And it is proposed that for his labor each man shall receive cloth or fishhooks or knives or what he will, to the value of one joint of his hand for every handful of balata that he may produce."

The old men grunted amongst themselves.

"You're going to make a good jungle trader, *amigo,*" Holm said. "And when we get going, I tell you there's a lot more money in balata than in collecting pots and beads. But look, I think the senate is going to veto your bill."

But the senate was not vetoing, only amending. The speaker said, diffidently:

"It is generous. Only some of the men say that the pay should not be paid to each man for what he produces, for some men are stronger than others. Therefore the pay should be paid to João, who will be the chief of the balata workers, to be divided evenly amongst all the men. For such is our custom."

"Good," Dave said. "That is agreed. What else is to be talked?"

"Nothing else. All is agreed."

"Good. Then let the drum signal that all the men who are well from their wounds come in from their villages and go swiftly to labor, for many days have been lost out of the season."

"It will signal. Only Kariwa must give the order for the signal, for he is now the ruler of the drum."

"Huh? What's that?"

"João said that Kariwa greatly desired the drum for a reason that no man could understand. Therefore it was talked amongst all the *ipa-ges* and so agreed. It was hoped that Kariwa would be pleased. The drum is here."

Just around the corner of the creek the drum was—the elusive drum that had evaded all of Rabeira's efforts to capture it; that, before that, had evaded all of scientist Scharnholtz's eager search; and that, long before that, had been reported by an obscure Portuguese explorer.

From twin tripods in a double catamaran sort of canoe it hung. The tripods were new, replacing older ones, worn out or broken. But the drum was old. An aged relic of long ago days when drums meant things more than signals; things that even the Old Wise Ones had forgotten.

This was a magnificent relic. A great, five-foot log of an old, rose-colored wood, hollowed out with excruciating labor through three hand holes in its upper surface, carved with a design that reminded Dave of the ancient frescoes of Chichen Itza, polished by years of handling to the soft lustre of wax. It had no conventional drum-heads. The hollow log itself was a great resonant shell.

Dave sucked breath through pinched lips.

"Let it signal," he said.

An old man took a rubber hammer in each hand and beat upon the polished surface; played on it, like on a musical instrument; on its top and on its sides. The spots to play upon were marked out, like keys, by round bare surfaces. All the rest of it was covered by its intricate carved design. Deep tones welled from its middle and a range of higher tones towards its ends.

Boom boom bump, a boom-a-bump-boom."

The sound swelled with immense volume that pervaded the whole air and thrummed and muttered away into the deep jungle.

THERE had been a time when Dave would have been ready to trade away all the goods he possessed, to toil and beg and bribe some old man to show him how the thing was worked and what were the cadences of that code.

But he was not listening to codes just now. He was leaning close to the ancient thing, running his fingers over the carved designs.

"By God!" He was whispering. "God Almighty! That's it! Dammit, it must be it!"

Dave swung round suddenly to the old men. "How long would it take to make a new drum like that?"

The old men grunted together. With Indian circumlocution they had to go into details before they came to the gist.

At long length it came. "A new drum, a strong drum with a young voice could be made with these new tools in perhaps the time that four moons die."

"Four months! I could get away before the rainy season."

Vargas Holm caught at his arm. A sudden alarm was in his face. "Hey, what madness are you talking now?"

Dave looked at him like out of a far mist.

"Why, that's it," he said. "It must be it."

"What must be what?" Holm was irritated by anxiety.

"It's—it must be the inscription."

Dave pawed the carving over again and peered at its intricacies. "The old Guaranu inscription. I can't read it; but I know enough to know that this isn't just patterns. It's writing."

"*Gott!*" Holm reverted to his half forgotten native tongue. "You can't read it? You don't know what it says? Whether it's lost cities, or—or something valuable?"

"Not me, I can't." But there was no regret in Dave's voice. "But Professor Snyder'll be able to. He's a shark on digging out ancient scripts." He swung round to the Old Wise Ones. "If I am ruler of the drum—" He fired it at them like an urgent prayer—"is it the custom that my word about the making of a new drum will be good?"

"The ruler's word about the drum is good," the Old Wise Ones told him.

"Very well, then." Dave stood upright and spoke with decision. "My word is that a new drum be made. A bigger drum, with a loud voice to signal the faraway villages all the messages that will be necessary about the new things that this old drum will buy and which I will bring back from my own country to pay for labor in the balata."

He put his arm about Vargas Holm's shoulders.

"I'm afraid, good friend," he told him, "that I'm not a prosperous jungle trader at all. I'm at heart just a collector of pots and beads for museums. Pots and beads and drums. That drum will keep my faith with the good man who put up the money for my trip. It will be the biggest thing that's ever come out of these jungles. And you know, and all these good Indians know, that a white man has got to keep faith."

Holm glowered at him in dismay.

"Yea-ss?" he hissed. "And what is it? Kings and begats? Or money?"

"I don't know," Dave repeated. "But whether it's dead kings or old loot, whatever it's worth, you can bet your last breath I'll get it for these people and bring it back with me. For them and us."

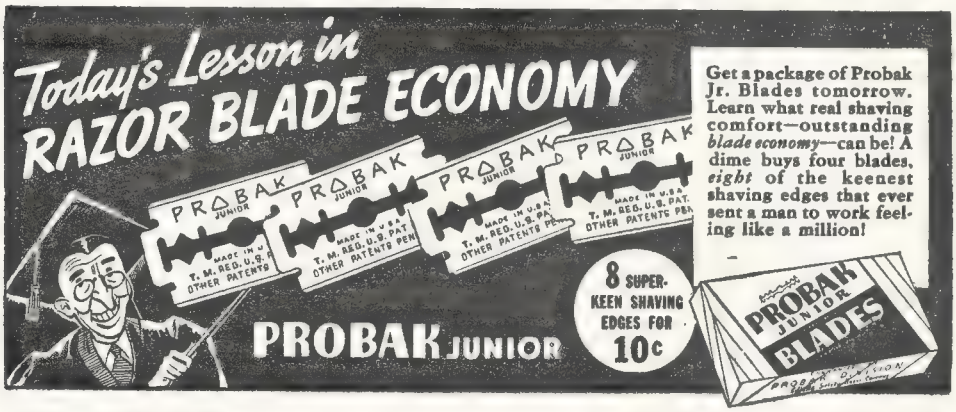
Dave laughed. Not through his teeth, but wide open.

"I'll come back. Just to see that you damn traders are doing right by these people. They're a good people and they have a million things yet that aren't written into books. And, *amigo mio*, it'll be the drum that'll pay for my coming this time. I'll owe nobody anything."

"Only these people." Vargas Holm said.

"Yes." Dave was serious. "Only these people. I'll keep faith."

Vargas Holm grinned. "They know that, you fool of a scientist. And so do I." He drew a breath like Dave was doing—a full breath, deep into his lungs. "It's a good clean river to come back to," he said.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THE LAST MAN

A novelette

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

IT WAS the close of December. Here at Standing Rock Agency, Dakota Territory, the day was bitterly cold. The stove in the agency office, going full blast and red hot in places, only slightly tempered the air. Bordon, checking over accounts with Agent Maguire before pulling out with his empty wagons for Bismarck, decided that he would have to thaw out in the store before departing; the animal warmth of the Indians there would help.

His opened buffalo coat, worn for the escort trip with the agency supplies, showed the blue blouse of the infantry. Between his buffalo overshoes and the coat bottom was just a glimpse of the narrow white stripe of a corporal upon the trousers seams. As he scanned the check-list, wind-reddened blue eyes set in a weathered face beneath the round fur cap, his breath almost shut off the writing. Why, curse it all, water would freeze in here five feet from the stove!

Through the cracks of the board office wall, guttural murmurs seeped in with the cold draught. This was beef-issue day for the Sioux, and for the Cheyennes who camped with them. Hundreds were come in from their win-

It was every man for himself now.

ter villages on the reservation, to draw their skin-and-bones cattle, their flour and sugar and whatever else their ration list demanded.

The agency grounds, about the store and corrals, showed crowded throngs of bucks and squaws, old and young, their red-and-blue blankets covering them from crown to moccasins. The store must be packed to the doors, Bordon thought. All the better, if a fellow didn't mind the smell of stale grease and lodge smoke and kinnikinnick. "Lonesome" Charlie Reynolds would be there too; Borden wanted a chat with him.

Maguire heaved a sigh of satisfaction as he finished checking. He was a hearty man, although a trifle testy; free with good cigars and secure in a fat appointment.

"I think this'll do," he said. "When do you leave?"

"As soon as I can get off."

"You'll have an easier trip back. You fellows can ride in the wagons."

"And freeze sitting down? Not much. We'll try to keep warm on our feet. We're infantry."

The agent cast an appraising glance at the lean figure, rangy flanks revealed by the open coat, and the lean hard face.

"You talk as though you might have been in the cavalry once."

"I was," Bordon replied. "With Custer's division in the war."

"Hm! You look young for that."

"Twenty-six. Enlisted under seventeen and served the last eighteen months."

"Came through all right, eh?"

"Of course. I'm lucky. Couldn't be hurt anyhow."

"How's that?" Maguire asked, poising his cigar. Bordon shrugged.

"Oh, no matter. I was in plenty of tight scrapes, but pulled through." Bordon shoved back his half-uttered thought—the bullet wasn't made that had his number. He had never forgotten that gipsy fortune-teller in the muster camp, years back; she had told him the truth, too. He straightened and began to button his coat. "I'm going to warm up in the store and have a word with Reynolds."

"Take along a cigar. Wonder you didn't re-enlist in the cavalry."

"No openings. I took what there was. This enlistment in the 17th Infantry expires a year from June, and if I can't get into the cavalry then, I quit for good."

Maguire chewed at his cigar.

"Hm! Educated, by your talk, and had experience. You ought to get a commission. All it takes is a little pull at Washington."

Bordon grunted. "I'll stand for a commission any time, but the one I get is going to be earned. That's why I've stayed in the service. I'll be back in the cavalry; you'll see!"

His confidence came from queer dark depths, not from knowledge. He was numbly fingering, as he spoke, the horn buttons on his coat.

Outside rose a muffled thud of hoofs, a rising murmur of voices, and sharply barked orders. Maguire stepped heavily to the door. He opened it, and the nipping cold rushed in. An oath escaped him.

"Cavalry, by God! Just in from Fort Rice—no, clear from Lincoln. That's Cap'n Yates, and Cap'n Tom Custer, with an ambulance. What's up?" He swung around, a muddy flush in his cheeks. "These Indians are uneasy enough already. I didn't send for troops; if they'd let me alone I can run things here. I'll report this to the Bureau, by God! You'd better get your men together and stand by."

"Not yet. The cavalry will handle the business, whatever it is."

Bordon passed the agent, and heard the warning follow him:

"It's a bad business or the general wouldn't have sent his brother. I call on you to post your men to guard this office!"

"To hell with you, you Injun-robber!" muttered Bordon as the door slammed.

He stood watching and his pulses beat a little faster; quickened, as they always did, to the sight of cavalry, and quickened now with an alert sense of danger.

Fort Lincoln was seventy miles northward, Rice being nearer. The detachment of the 7th from the headquarters post had brought an ambulance. Bordon wondered why, as he watched the detachment bearing in, front of platoons, at the trot, with horses a-steam in the cold.

One hundred men—two troops, as the times went. Square, stolid Yates. Tom Custer, slim even in his wolfskin overcoat, tawny like his brother the general, blond hair falling below his collar, keen face florid with the cold, cavalry mustache frosted. A lieutenant was with them.

THE detachment halted out from the store and faced the Indians. Bucks and squaws, blanket-shrouded, were now gazing in a sullen silence which was oc-

casionally broken by a staccato shout or yell of insult.

Captain Yates swung off toward the office and went in. He came out again with defiant stride and rejoined the command. The lieutenant led off two platoons in column of fours, as though to make some search on the reservation.

"You get your gun."

Bordon glanced aside at the words. He found, at his elbow, old Isaiah, the grizzled black squawman, who had two wives among the Sioux. He nodded recognition and greeting.

"What's going on, Ike? What's the matter?"

Old Isaiah, in his ancient buffalo robe, a ragged black wool hat tied over his ears with a strip of blanket, had an ashen pallor in his wrinkled face. He was one scared Negro.

"I dunno," he rejoined in a mumble. "Them Sioux, they don't like these pony-sojers come. Walk-a-heaps neither. What you-all doing heah?"

Bordon chuckled. He was always amused by Isaiah's queer lingo, a combination of Indian patter and darky accent, like nothing on earth. "Walk-a-heaps," of course, meant infantry. Although Bordon himself could get on rather deftly with the Indian speech, he found Isaiah sometimes hard to comprehend.

"Escort for the wagons, down from Bismarck with flour and sugar for your wives, Ike."

The other grunted. "Damn bad flour, and sugar 'most all sand; the agent lose his hair some day. Yassuh! Hair of those pony-sojers mighty loose right now, suh."

"Yes? You must know something. What's up?"

"No, suh, not me." Isaiah was in a curious funk all the same. "But if those sojers try to do what they come to do, it sho' means fight. This ground will be red. All the Sioux and Cheyennes go to join Sitting Bull. Then this dam' agent sho' won't have no Injuns to cheat."

Motion had developed, as Indian runners bolted out into the reservation. Yates and Custer stood beside their horses, the troopers eased their mounts. Waiting, waiting for what? If eyes and insulting tongues could have killed, they would have been dead in their tracks.

From the store doorway came the scout, "Lonesome" Charlie Reynolds, in caped army overcoat and wolfskin cap, carbine tucked in his arm. His leisurely step, his mild blue eyes, denoted careless unconcern as he paced through the Indians and approached the detachment. He shook hands with Yates and Tom Custer, casually exchanged a few words, and then began to chat with the troopers. After a few minutes Custer gestured to a squad of the men and led them toward the store.

Bordon tensed. Here, it suddenly struck him, was the real business. Reynolds had brought out some needed word. The column starting off for the reservation was a blind. Trouble was about to break, but inside the store, not out.

As he turned and stepped out, old Isaiah caught his arm.

"No, suh, no, suh! You stay here."

"I'm frozen," said Bordon. "Going to get warm."

"You get warmer than you reckon, maybe. Then stay cold a mighty long time, suh."

Bordon impatiently threw off the Negro's hand and headed on. He heard Reynolds call his name, but paid no heed, as he pushed through the Indians who were milling around the entrance. He shoved open the door and pressed on toward the stove. He caught a nod from the storekeeper, a frightened gesture telling him to get out, but ignored it.

The troopers were loafing near the door. Custer was at the counter, buying tobacco and taking his time doing it. Bordon pushed closer; he knew that Custer was not in here to buy tobacco.

The room was suffocating, with Indians so tightly blanketed that only their furtive eyes showed. Some fear lay in those eyes, but more of rage, hatred, tensed suspicion. Bordon felt choked, and opened his coat anew, but the sweat on his tensed body was cold. This room was a wolf den, and Tom Custer was the hunter.

The officer faced half about, leaning with his elbow on the counter, toward the end. He stuffed his pipe, while those wintry eyes of his casually flitted about. The storekeeper, flushed and nervous, gladly left him and attended to the Indians; his jovialty was forced and awkward.

Custer looked much alone. His squad idled inside the entrance, fronting the black scowls.

Bordon, moved by a nudging impulse, stepped leisurely for the counter. Something told him this suspense was due to snap without warning, swiftly as lightning from a swollen cloud. The counter was better at one's back than the hot stove.

Bordon's lips were formed to ask for tobacco, brushing a burly buck and ignoring the contemptuous growl. He felt Custer's eye flick to him, then to the buck, with sharp intentness. Then the Indian edged in ahead of him, insolently defiant.

"Shoog!" he grunted at the storekeeper, his shoulder turned toward Custer, but his blanket open in front.

"How much?" The storekeeper's voice was pallid and uncertain. The Indian loosed his blanket-hold to point at a ration package; his head followed the storekeeper's movement toward the package. And, swift as light, Custer sprang.

He had the Indian fast from behind, pinioned his arms inside the blanket. The sturdy buck strained and heaved. Custer's voice leaped.

"Here, men! I've got him. Tie him and take him out—"

The room rocked to sudden clamor. The squad of troopers tried to break through. The Indian had ceased to struggle, but a sharp cry broke from Bordon. Out of nowhere, a young buck had appeared, a boy with blazing eyes, with strangely scarred cheek. His knife slid up into sight, poised for Custer's back.

Bordon leaped, caught the young fellow, whirled him about, knocked him sprawling, to be trampled by surging feet. The squad of men rammed in with their carbine butts at work and took the prisoner.

Custer, who had snatched at his revolver, stowed it away and gave Bordon one flaming look.

"What's your name?"

"Frank Bordon, sir. Company H, 17th Infantry."

"You're damned quick. Should be in the cavalry."

There was time for this much, no more, as they shoved out. Then they emerged, pushed by the yelling mob into the burst of fury outside. The prisoner was hustled on to the covered ambulance; he was boosted up the rear steps and jugged within tied flaps. Bordon started to get his own men formed up, but saw they were not needed.

A plucky bunch, that detachment; fifty of them here, in their buffalo coats, carbines at advance, facing ten times their number of redskins, with Winchesters whipping out from beneath blankets. Repeaters against single shots. That was the cavalry way—audacity!

BORDON, back at the agent's office, watched. Chiefs harangued, bucks yelled and shook their guns, squaws shrieked, runners tore for the reservation villages. A rescue? Not a chance. When he heard the crisp orders and saw the outfit trot off for Fort Lincoln with their prisoner, Bordon's heart ached to be one of them.

Maguire was in a stew of rage and fear.

"They never told me anything about it! They'll answer for this. That's Rain-in-the-face they got."

"Why did they arrest him?" Bordon demanded, frowning.

"Huh! None of my business. My job is to keep these Sioux peaceful. As long as they're on the reservation they're all right, aren't they?"

"While they stay here for you to feed, sure."

"You bet. Now these yellow-legs come and arrest a Sioux head warrior on my very agency! Rain's a good man; far as I know he's done nothing. You blasted military just want a campaign! Well, you'll get it, and more'n you bargain for. I look to see half my Sioux and Cheyennes light out for Sitting Bull, after this outrage. When Bull hears of this, d'you think he'll come in with his people and submit to me? Not much."

"You lose plenty Indians as it is," said Bordon. "And you ought to. Maybe if you fed 'em enough they'd not make off to find their own grub elsewhere, like Bull."

"That's a damned lie," snapped Maguire, with another gust of fury. "They waste their rations. They draw their flour, empty it on the ground, and use the sacks for shirts. I've seen it done."

"Sure," drawled Bordon. "They come in from outside and throw the flour away to show the reservation Indians that Bull's people live fat. Well," he added tersely, "nothing more, is there? I'm joining the wagons. Time to pull out."

"Remember, if you want that cavalry appointment, I can help you."

"Thanks, it'll come all right in due time," flung back Bordon, with a laugh.

He set out for the wagons. The tumult and turmoil on the agency grounds had by now simmered down; many of the bucks had departed, as though to hold a council. The store was doing business again, but Charlie Reynolds had wisely gone with the troopers. Bordon himself, knuckles still tingling from the blow he had dealt, rather guessed that the store was not the best place for him either.

As the teamsters were hooking up, he saw old Isaiah shuffling for him, and waited.

"They sho' got Itiomagaju, Rain-in-the-Face!"

"What for?" Bordon asked.

"He killed the hoss doctor and the sutler with the cavalry, year and a half back, in Powder River country," said Isaiah, whose panic had departed. "Injuns all know of it; he done boasted of it himself, at the sun dance. Reynolds done heard about it. Rain's a big man, suh, a pow'ful big man. The Injuns are mad because the pony-sojers took him off like a squaw in the sick-wagon."

"And what will they do about it?"

"I dunno. Sitting Bull never come in now—never come in anyhow, till the iron road stays out of the Sioux hunting grounds, and white folks out of the Black Hills. Yassuh, I reckon there'll be one hell of a time."

Old Isaiah spat, then spoke more directly, in friendly warning.

"You'd better pull out quick with your walk-a-heaps, suh. You done knocked down Rain's nephew, the son of Iron Horn. Pretty soon he look for you. You shamed him a heap, suh; befo' he can make himself warrior, he must wipe the blow off his face. He'll try to kill you. Don't come here again."

"Thanks, Ike. I'll watch out for myself."

Bordon strode on for the wagons, forgetting the boy and all else, looking ahead now. Custer had taken note of him! "You're damned quick. Should be in the cavalry!" It was something, you bet, to draw a hearty word from Cap'n Tom Custer—an admission that any infantry soldier was of 7th Cavalry stuff! A proud regiment, a lucky regiment,

with a lucky number. A campaigning regiment, every man picked and hard and true.

D'amn Maguire and his influence, and a political appointment got at a price! Any commission won by Frank Bordon would be obtained in the field. Custer could recommend, all right. There were ways and ways. A man with the 7th saw more action in a day than he would likely see in a month with the infantry.

His thoughts drove on. So Rain-in-the-Face was a big warrior to the Sioux, eh? How they and the Cheyennes had yelled! Well, if the pot boiled over, so much the better; a soldier never won anything in camp or barracks. And, thought Bordon, he must write to Margaret about this, tell her about Tom Custer, tell her things were shaping at last!

Poor girl, she had been like himself, waiting for something to turn up. He could not ask her to marry an enlisted man. No future for them there. But shoulder straps, a commission, a future —then hurray! It was worth working for. Hard to get, too, with half the country full of demobilized officers. So much the better; head up and eyes front!

He must tell her to watch the papers for campaign news, for his own name. A citation; Frank Bordon, recommended for a commission! She had been sure he would get it. She knew what the gipsy had said, there in the muster camp where everyone wanted to know the chances of stopping a Reb bullet or saber. No one had found out flatly; the gipsy, squinting into a palm, had the trick of gab. Still, Bordon could read the words now, and was astonished. He remembered them clearly.

"You are born to fortune. You have left a young girl crying. You will be a soldier after this war is over; I see you wearing a blue uniform. It has white trimmings—no, that is only for a short time. They become yellow again. You are far away from here, on the other side of a great river. You are riding among hot hills. Now there has been a battle. I see many bodies."

She had dropped his hand. Bordon recalled his own laughing words.

"Well, go on! What about me?"

"I see you rewarded for something you have done; tell the young girl."

"Reward? What kind of a reward?"

"More than you expect or would believe. You are brave. You are a soldier."

All this came back to him now, in the bitter cold of the Dakota day. She had seen him back in the cavalry, sure! He could see himself there already. And fighting in the hills? A battle? A reward? By heaven, she had told him the truth about coming through the Civil War unhurt. And now the rest was coming true.

"A reward, you bet!" thought Bordon cheerfully. "More than I expect or would believe, eh? A commission, no doubt about it. That's what I'm out for now. And if I do get back in the cavalry, then sure as fate that gipsy told the truth!"

Bordon was no more superstitious than the average, maybe, but he had good reason to believe that gipsy's prophecy. It was coming true now, all of it! And the thought sent him tramping through the snow with a joyous heart.

CHAPTER II

THE HEART OF LITTLE HAIR

THE days passed, the weeks passed; the white trimmings did not become yellow. Still, Bordon remained cheerily confident. Things would shape up, sure.

"Sojer, will you work? No, I'll sell my shirt first!" yelped the boys on the Bismarck streets. Derision, both covert and open, touched the infantry blue and the cavalry blue. For Rain-in-the-Face, while the Indian Bureau and the War Department locked horns, had taken

Dutch leave. He slipped out of the Lincoln guardhouse one night, along with a white grain thief who had friends outside. He joined Sitting Bull's hostiles.

And, while the trails greened, the reservations had rapidly thinned of Cheyenne and Sioux. Families struck their lodges and traveled westward, and no soldiers halted them. On his next escort duty down to Standing Rock before the river cleared, Bordon saw few Indians around. Sight of the place caused him to remember the scene there, and the scarred face of the boy he had knocked down. A peculiar scar across the cheek, like an arrow, puckering up the coppery skin.

As summer drew on and then waned, Bismarck became a mess. Toughs, gamblers, freighters and gold seekers, waiting to get through into the Black Hills; plenty folks there already, according to the say. Freight cluttered the terminus of the Northern Pacific rails. Government warehouses were flooded with army supplies, moved in before snow blockaded the road. And the iron road could not go on until the hostiles were rounded up.

The cavalry bugles of Fort Lincoln across the river sounded "Stables," "Watering," "Boots and Saddles." The troops rode out, rode back again. And on a certain day Bordon stood talking with the scout, Charlie Reynolds, on the parade ground, when they saw Captain Tom Custer crossing the parade.

"Just a minute. Want to speak to the cap'n," said Reynolds, and put himself into the course Custer was taking. The latter spoke in his brisk way.

"Well, what's wanted, Charlie?"

"Got something for you, Cap'n."

Bordon saw the thing clearly. Just a piece of buckskin with a red daub on it.

"A friendly brought it in to me," went on Reynolds, "with a message from Rain-in-the-Face for Little Long Hair. That daub's supposed to be your heart. Rain says he's going to cut Little Hair's heart out, and maybe Long Hair's too, for seizing him like a squaw, jailing him, chaining his legs and shaming him."

Tom Custer laughed shortly. "Indian brag, eh? Where is he now, Charlie?"

Reynolds shrugged his wool shoulders.

"Can't say, Cap'n. Hiding out with Bull someplace. Over on the Big Horn, likely."

Tom Custer surveyed him and then made an abrupt remark, with covert challenge.

"I understand you can't take that message from department headquarters to Sitting Bull."

The fair, almost girlish face of the scout remained calm; his fine blue eyes held steady under their long lashes. His gentle voice made answer, and reached Bordon clearly.

"I'd never get any chance to deliver it, Cap'n. Every Injun there knows I

tipped you off about Rain, that day at the Agency. They'd mob me, and I'd simply be twenty-four hours dying. Maybe forty-eight."

"Right," Custer nodded. "No use in that; you're too good a man. But it leaves the general damned hard put to find a courier to be trusted."

Luck again—Tom Custer brought him luck, apparently. Bordon stepped forward into the level stare.

"I'll go, sir."

Custer's gaze swept him up and down. Then the eyes and voice became more tolerant.

"Oh! You're the man in the store at Standing Rock. Infantry. I said you should be in the cavalry. What are you doing here?"

Reynolds cut in. "Over on a visit with me, Cap'n. His command's across at Camp Hancock."

"What's it to do with me?"

"If a courier is needed to the hostiles, sir, I'll go," Bordon repeated.

"You volunteer, eh? From the infantry? You won't do. It takes a rider and a damned good one."

Bordon smiled. "I was in the Custer cavalry in the war. We all rode a little."

"You were? Very good." Custer's gaze measured him anew. "You don't speak Sioux?"

"I've picked up a smattering during service out here. I've never been in the Big Horn country, but I'll chance getting through."

Again Reynolds spoke up with reassurance.

"I think he could make it, Cap'n. Old Isaiah, down at Standing Rock, is going in. He's lost one of his wives. He could show Bordon the way."

Custer tugged at his mustache.

"Understand, it's no picnic. General Terry at department headquarters directs General Custer to send word by a reliable courier to Sitting Bull himself, that unless he and all his runaways come in to their reservations by January first and stay there, the soldiers will get after them. If Bull swallows this, all right. If he doesn't, you know what will happen to you."

"I'll risk it."

"Well, I've no say-so in the matter; it's for General Custer to decide. But I'll mention you to him, and recommend you too, from what I saw of you at Standing Rock. If he so desires, he'll apply to your commanding officer for leave for you; damned if I don't hope you can be spared!"

Custer turned on his heel. He flipped away the piece of buckskin, carelessly. Then, as he strode away, he tossed a final word at Bordon.

"If you make a go of it, you'll be remembered."

Bordon's heart leaped. The reward! Yes, he had been right about it. Custer brought luck. Somehow, he would get his cavalry trimmings yet. And later, his commission; the reward, greater than he expected or could believe. A commission, of course!

"Can't have this thing passed about." Charlie Reynolds took a step or two and picked up the scrap of buckskin. "May not look much, but it means a hell of a lot, to those in the know. It'd throw a scare into some of those recruits."

"That was a nice gentle message you delivered," said Bordon.

"Yep. Rain means it, too; Injuns don't joke along that line. You're liable to get a picture buckskin yourself, if that boy you knocked down knows where to find you. I heard about it. He's Rain's nephew."

Bordon chuckled. "He can't have my heart. It's back in Ohio."

"Well, keep your eye peeled," the scout said soberly. "That boy'll grow up and he won't forget. He'll consider himself shamed, just like his uncle, until he wipes off the mark in blood."

"Think I'll have any chance to go?" asked Bordon. "Look here! I know a young fellow in the cavalry who'd trade

off with me. If it'd help any to get transferred—"

"Nope," and Reynolds chuckled. "You'll go, sure as shooting. If Cap'n Custer speaks up, Gen'ral Custer takes his say-so. I'll get off word to Isaiah immediate. It'll grind down on the gen'ral to call on the infantry for a courier, but a trooper of the 7th wouldn't last long in that country, after what was done to Rain.

"With old Ike, you can make it. He's afraid to take any such message, and not a 'Ree will go, either. Ike will show you in, but getting out is another matter. They're liable not to let you out again, or him either. You really aim to go, huh?"

Bordon nodded. "Of course. I'm sick of that infantry camp over at Bismarck. That's why I'm here whenever I can get across."

"You'll be in the cavalry yet if you keep your hair. Tom Custer likes you. Gen'ally he's mighty uppish. How I've heard the men cuss him out! Listen, don't wear sojer clothes to those hostiles. I'll find you a buckskin rig. Hope you get back before spring, or you'll miss something."

"You think we'll be out hunting them, then?"

"You bet. Sending such a message is foolishness. They won't come in. They've jumped the reservation. They're sore about the railroad survey and white men in their sacred Black Hills, and they've got plenty to eat. Just the job for Custer. He's r'aring to go."

"Why not the infantry?"

Reynolds laughed his soft laugh. "The walk-a-heaps? The 7th will give them the leavings. Old Curly won't bother with infantry."

On his way to the river landing and the skiff, Bordon walked high. He was going, then! And coming back successful. That was in the stars; he had known it all the time. The thing shaped up clear enough now. Thank the Lord for that little fracas back at Standing Rock! No hurry; a few months more, and the trail would be straight. With Tom Custer his friend at court, the future mounted in the skies.

NONE the less, he did not forget the cavalry lad who had hinted at making a swap and getting into the infantry. No use, Reynolds had said. Just as well to keep him in mind, however.

Jack Mullen's saloon in Bismarck was overflowing this night. Citizens and soldiers crowded the bar and tables, stirring the dust of the plank floor with their boots. Bordon elbowed in for a nightcap. It was nearing tattoo, when every man was due back in quarters.

Cavalry here from the post, blustery and a-swagger, forage caps tilted and biting gibes ready on the tongue. Recruits, for the most, to whom running the guard was a soldier brag. Bordon made through and caught the eye of Mullens. The latter stood watchful, in shirtsleeves, his shotgun leaning behind the bar. Almost anything was liable to happen these nights.

Bordon saw the young fellow he sought, a lad in cavalry trousers with buckskin reinforcing their seat. The boy turned pale lashes in a flushed face upon him, with a maudlin laugh.

"Infantry to hell! Hurray for Sittin' Bull! What'll you give for a scalp to show around, huh?"

"You're drunk." Bordon downed his liquor. "You'd better get back to the post."

The lad swayed and righted himself with an effort.

"Listen, sojer. You wear the wrong color to talk to me! I seen you over at Lincoln today; that's as far west as you get. We're the boys to fetch Sittin' Bull. When the 7th Cavalry starts after him, it'll be all over before the infantry have patched up their shoes. Who ever heard of a walk-a-heap ketching an Injun, ex-

cept maybe a damned reservation squaw?"

"Hey! What's that?"

Other ears had pricked to the words. There was a rush and a blow; instantly the fracas was on.

The room leaped into a confusion of shouts and thudding figures, Mullens at length managed to drive them all out, amid the cheering, ducking civilians. Bordon and a sergeant herded the panting infantrymen and marched them for the camp, voices rising high. Hurray for the infantry and damn the yellow-legs! The infantry with their long toms would be doing twenty miles a day on sowbelly and beans while them fellers with their carbine popguns were raising blisters instead of saddle corns—

In due time, and none to spare, old black Isaiah trailed into the post. Bordon talked with him, all ready now, the duty his. Isaiah blinked at him.

"To Tatanka Yotanka? Sitting Bull? Yassuh, I reckon so. He's in the Big Horn country, sho' is. One week, maybe ten days. But," he added with a snaggy grin, "you sho' ain't coming back, suh. Bad hearts out there. If Bull says to stay with my wife, you bet I stay, or he kill me quick. Maybe not so quick."

"No killing, Ike," said Bordon. "Just a message to take."

"Maybe your scalp come back fo' answer. You better wear weasel-tail medicine, same as Rain-in-the-Face. Sho' is pow'ful strong medicine, suh."

"Mine's stronger," and Bordon laughed.

So they went, but Bordon's laughter had died out long ere they reached their goal.

The Hunkpapa village was nested in a valley of red-willow and aspens, yellowed by the early frosts. Bordon could not get the Indian name of the stream, as Isaiah voiced it. A hundred lodges were here, mainly Sioux, with a large pony herd. Bordon had been instructed to use his eyes, and used them. These Indians were rich, but the 7th Cavalry could clean up everything in sight here.

No yells and threats now, but a threat more potent. Insolent stares, a studied disdain, hostility deep and assured. A lazy village, secure of the present, careless of the future, with the very dogs fat and lazy. And, for the white man, an enmity virulent and deep.

Old Isaiah slackened pace, and pointed.

"Tatanka Yotanka; that's him, settin' by the door of his lodge. You shorely better be careful. Your hair's looser than you think, a heap looser—"

Bordon dismounted, dropped the reins and walked forward, conscious that he was followed by the Negro, fearful and breathing hard. His attention was all focused upon the stout Sioux sitting upon a tanned buffalo hide by the lodge entrance, blanket dropped to his waist.

Sitting Bull, medicine worker, buffalo bringer, white man hater, a power and looking it to the full. Two brown braids fell forward over his bare shoulders. Thick set, of brawny torso, light-colored for a Sioux, he was brown instead of dark copper. His dourly seamed visage was pitted by smallpox; the full eyes, bloodshot of whites, gazed morosely from shrewd and heavy lids.

Bordon felt the glow of an inner heat windowed by those eyes. He was being tested. The face of Sitting Bull, searching him from the framing braids, did not change; there was no stir of limbs or body. He was not asked to sit down. He stood waiting, and it was a long wait. Then Bull grunted.

"What?"

Bordon mustered his Sioux. "The head captain of all the soldiers sends word. He tells Sitting Bull and all the Sioux and Cheyennes to come in. If they do not come in by the middle of winter, the soldiers will look for them."

Bull's down-curved lips tightened with a half smile, half sneer. He had himself in full control, but it was an ominous control. Anything might hap-

pen. Bordon felt the thrust of unseen forces. All the village appeared to be watching, listening, with bated breath. Isaiah shuffled nervously.

"You lie," Sitting Bull suddenly said. "You come from the Long Yellow Hair. You and that black man have come to spy. You dress like a scout who carries a message, but you are a pony soldier. I know a pony soldier when I see him. Why should I not kill you both?"

Glowering, he hesitated, in a mental struggle that darkened his seamed face; the question was merely a thought spoken aloud. He went on almost at once.

"But I will not kill you. Look around; you are safe. We will not come in. I was made an Indian. I am all Indian, and not an agency Indian. Now go. Tell your soldier captain you saw me. We are here. We will not run away. If he wants me, he can find me. Now go. No one will hurt you."

"By golly, go quick!" quavered Isaiah. "I don't care one damn about my wife—"

The eyes of the seated chief followed them hotly as they turned back to the horses. They mounted, then were stopped by a striding figure. Isaiah's bleat of alarm told Bordon that this was Rain-in-the-Face, bulking in the way, furious but calm.

"Blue Eyes," he addressed Bordon, thus referring to Charlie Reynolds, "told upon me to the soldiers. You touched me in the store and showed me to Little Hair. I know you; I cannot kill you now, for Tatanka Yotanka lets you go. I sent a picture to Little Hair. I will take the hair from you and from Blue Eyes, but I will cut out the heart of Little Hair and eat it."

Rain went striding away. They rode on, with old Isaiah in a sweat of fear. Half Sioux as he was, that terrible silence had put panic into him. They were almost at the outskirts of the disdainful village when behind them came a slim figure clad in breech-clout alone. He ran with hand uplifted, with a shout on his lips.

"Now we're gone for sure. Bull sent him," groaned Isaiah. "You hit him, suh —look out for a knife!"

Bordon deliberately drew rein and waited. A boy, yes; Bordon started at the blazing venom in that scarred face. He recognized the boy of the agency store, somewhat grown now; the face was the same, with a scar like an arrow distorting the cheek.

The boy came straight on, intent, silent now. He leaped. Bordon swerved his horse from the extended arm, but there was no weapon. Something was thrust into his hand.

"I see you!" panted out the boy, eyes flaming. "You are the walking-soldier who hit me with your hand. I could not find you again. I went away with my face burning; the girls laugh at me. I do not forget; take that, so you will not forget either. You will come again. I have seen you in a dream, when I made warrior medicine by myself. You will come to the Greasy Grass, and I will kill you same as Rain kills Yellow Hair. Good-by."

He went back at a lope. Bordon looked at the gift, a piece of buckskin painted with a red heart. The paint was still wet and had smeared his palm so that his hand looked bloody. He wiped it on his thigh.

"You know what he done say?" quavered the old negro.

"I guess so. He threatened me. Where is that place—Greasy Grass?"

"I dunno, suh; some river, I reckon, further west. Now let's go quick."

Bordon laughed. "No hurry, Ike. We're safe enough."

Not dead yet, and far from it. He had delivered the message, had the answer and was riding back. Rain's angry voice, the boy's frenzied threat, the silent village—all these were nothing, as against Sitting Bull's measured defiance. That meant business. The 7th would take the

warpath, and he himself would not be overlooked. Things were shaping up and no mistake! He had earned his reward now. Action in the field, and a commission.

"Blood on you," said Isaiah. "Scared, suh? Boy give you a sign, same as his uncle Rain sent a sign to Cap'n Custer."

"Not scared, Ike," and Bordon smiled happily. "I told you we'd be safe enough."

"Sitting Bull, he warn't afraid; nobody afraid back there. They just let us go, like no-account hound dogs. How many Injun you see?"

Bordon calculated. "A hundred lodges in sight, more around the bend—I'd say five hundred all told. Likely six hundred men and boys for a fight. The 7th Cavalry will just eat 'em up, Ike."

The gray wool wagged. "I don't guess you seen 'em all, suh; plenty more scattered out, getting winter meat. One village here, Sitting Bull's village. Where Crazy Hoss and his Cheyennes? Where Big Road with his Ogalas? Yassuh, maybe five thousand Injuns here right now, more by spring. Bull send out word he has dreams, all can whip the sojers—"

Mumbling, slurring plains talk and Indian words with his remnants of Negro accent, old Isaiah lapsed into broody thoughts. Bordon rode on, whistling. "I see you rewarded for something you have done—" There the gipsy had spoken plain, clear words! And now he had done something. What would Tom Custer say?

It was Reynolds the scout who spoke first, when he had heard Bordon's yarn.

"Bull must think his medicine is bullet proof, huh? So you got your heart on buckskin same as Cap'n Tom—and lucky at that. Greasy Grass, the young devil said? I've heard Injuns mention it. Somewhere over west of the Rosebud—"

But Captain Tom Custer's bluff remark was more to the point.

"When the campaign opens, if you're still at Hancock, come and see me."

And Bordon's heart sang in him, as he wrote Margaret, back in Ohio. One campaign dead ahead, and the future all clear!

SPRING was late, with blustery weather. The snowy plains around Fort Lincoln bared by fits and starts, while rotting ice slowly drifted down the river. Bismarck was full of fight and civilian talk; packers', teamsters', leather-leg frontiersmen's talk, goldseekers' talk.

The Bismarck paper carried news, official and by grapevine. A big campaign, held up until the weather opened the hills, was due. The hostiles were in the Big Horn country, in Montana south of the Yellowstone; they were to be trapped there in the focus of three columns, from the south, from the east, from the west, before they could break across the Yellowstone.

Murphy, sergeant of H Company, first caught the bad word and passed it on.

"We're not to go, boys."

"What's that?"

"Nope. The cap'n has his orders. To hell with such orders! H Company walks guard in Lincoln whilst the yeller-legs chase them reds."

Bordon sat cold, with a clutch in his throat. Then it passed, and his spirits rose. After all, what was it to him? He had Tom Custer's promise. His visits to Lincoln had been interrupted while the ice went out, but now he was free to go.

He went, and found Lincoln changed. He sensed the change at once. Here was an air of serious, solemn earnest. The faces of the women in Officers' Row were sober; so were those of the laundresses of Suds Row. Officers had become grave. Men off-duty bantered all too lightly and with determination. The talk of fidgety recruits, anent hair and squaws and derring-do, jangled with a silly bravado. The very air was nervous and jumpy.

Bordon got his first hint of the reasons behind all this, from "Lonesome" Reynolds.

"Come over again, have you?" The scout's face was serene, his calm blue eyes shone with a peculiar inner light. "Ready to head after Bull?"

"Yes, and not a chance with the infantry," Bordon answered bitterly. "I want a commission out of this campaign. I'll come out of it a captain."

"Oh! That's a big jump. Maybe you'll do it, but I've got a funny feeling that a lot of us aren't coming out at all. A heap of others have the same notion."

"What the devil!" Bordon exclaimed, staring at the scout. "Are you serious?"

Reynolds nodded. "The 'Rees camped yonder say we're too slow; ought to have struck before this. A big heap of hostiles have had time to jump the reservations and join Bull. And those 'Rees know! Now Old Curly is down in Washington; something wrong there. Major Reno's in command. A good soldier, they say, but he's never fought Injuns; he isn't popular, either, for certain reasons. Terry has never fought Injuns. And we're to look for Sioux and Cheyennes better armed than we are. Those Winchesters outshoot the cavalry Springfields." Reynolds shrugged, and his face cleared. "Oh, well, that's what we're here for. Not worried about your hair, huh?"

Bordon laughed. "Nonsense! I lived through one war and I'll live through another. I see myself coming out a captain, I tell you."

"Maybe you're lucky. I see a blank," said Reynolds. "No girl is praying for me either. Look! There goes Custer, if you aim to speak with him."

Bordon hurried. Tom Custer looked him over, was short and testy.

"I remember, yes. General Custer ought to be back any day. If he doesn't get here in time I'll ask Major Reno to apply to General Terry for your services as a scout with us."

"I'd much rather be a trooper, sir."

"Then you'll have to effect the trade yourself. I'm too busy."

Custer turned. Bordon spoke out recklessly.

"One minute, please! The 7th is sure to go?"

"We're held up; but we're the outfit to find those hostiles. And the 7th under General Custer can whip all the Indians and halfbreed renegades between the Yellowstone and the Arkansas."

With this explosion Custer strode off, stiff and wrathy. Things were evidently not to his liking. Reynolds had disappeared. Bordon walked on. A trade, eh? He remembered the lad with the yellow lashes, the tipsy young blowhard recruit. He cursed himself now for not having made the swap long before this. However, things must shape up—

Then he saw his man, found the young fellow coming for him with intent air.

"Hi, Bordon! Just met Charlie Reynolds. He said you were looking for me."

Bless the scout! Bordon warmed happily.

"Oh, sure! I was wondering if you were still in the notion of making a swap. My company stays to garrison the post, and I'd like to be off with the 7th."

The other brightened, flung a glance around, and spoke eagerly.

"Well, I'd sooner fight mosquitos than those Injuns; there'll be a whole arm of 'em. I ain't anxious to go out after 'em. Everybody says I'll be scalped first on account of my yellow hair. I'm sick; tried to get on hospital list and they won't take me. It's the mosquitos. They poison me. I walked beat last night with a mosquito netting over my head. So you want to trade, huh? That suits me fine."

The young fellow was in a tremble. The men had thrown a scare into him. Not to be blamed, maybe; a lad green from home, thought Bordon, ignorant that it took a hundred bullets to kill one man.

"What troop are you in?"

"Custer's, damn him. I know about the bloody heart he got. They say the Injuns aim to eat the hearts out of everybody that gets killed or captured."

Custer's troop! Luck again. Bordon felt his heart pounding. The white trimmings were changing to yellow!

"You bet I'll swap!" Bordon exclaimed. "Mosquitos for Injuns. White for yellow. Come along—it can be worked."

True enough there. Almost anything could be done, in this stress, to keep the ranks strong with stout hearts. Let the lad stay in garrison, on the infantry roll, substituting for a man needed elsewhere. "Absent with leave." That was enough.

It was finished, and the first person Bordon met was Charlie Reynolds, who congratulated him heartily.

"Lost your chevrons, but you're in Custer's troop. Bully for you! And listen here; watch him, see? Custer, I mean. Between you and me, I've heard a lot of talk and brag about two or three officers who are slated to be shot in the back. A lot o' these recruits don't take to discipline."

Bordon's eyes glittered suddenly. "You're crazy! By God, man, you can't mean—"

"I do." Reynolds nodded. "I hear the general is coming tomorrow, and we're off. Talk and brag, I guess that's all it amounts to. Once we cut loose, I don't reckon any sorehead will have a cartridge to waste on his grudge. Better keep it for himself at the last pinch."

"Still croaking, are you?"

"Oh, hell!" Reynolds smiled, with a flush of honest apology. "I don't know why I feel so down. I keep hearing "Taps" in my ears, like a young warrior making his medicine. This damned place gets me nervous and on edge. Once we're out and away, it'll all be different, you bet."

"Sure will," Bordon agreed cheerily. "Look here, I'll tell you something. Got to tell somebody or I'll bust! It just doesn't seem possible, Charlie—"

He had always felt drawn to the scout; the two of them fitted together, somehow. Now he broached to Reynolds what he would have told no one else, save Margaret—all the story about that gipsy in the muster camp, years back. It had actually happened. The white trimmings had turned yellow again.

Reynolds regarded him with awe. The scout, imbued with Indian medicine beliefs, took this confidence with a simple earnestness.

"I sure can't, Bordon. You're lucky, all right; I always did feel it. Gosh! You sure are lucky. You got strong medicine."

BORDON rode with the same boyish abandon, the brimming happiness, he had felt years ago, when at seventeen he first

clattered out to fight the Rebs. The gipsy had been right. Through one war, now riding with the cavalry again, to earn reward for a deed done. By thunder, the Sioux boy with the scarred face was to be thanked for this! If it had not been for that boy at Standing Rock, Frank Bordon would still be fighting mosquitos at Lincoln!

The regiment marched in column of fours. From porches and parade and Suds Row waved handkerchiefs. The band led off with "The Girl I Left Behind Me." Bordon caught the joyous mellow baritone of Harrington, the troop lieutenant, lilting out the words:

"The hope of final victory
Within my bosom burning,
Is mingled with sweet thoughts of thee
And of my fond returning.
And should I ne'er return again
Still worth thy love thou'lt find me,
Dishonor's breath shall never stain
The name I'll leave behind me."

The 'Ree squaws in their camp outside the post set up a wail in a different key, high pitched and rasping. The infernal wailing followed the column for a long way.

Full "peace time" strength, and forty per cent recruits, according to the tell, at that. Twelve companies, 28 officers, 600 men. The rest of the column—three companies of infantry, the gatling gun detachment, the baggage—were on ahead. Here were 'Ree scouts, old Isaiah to do the talking if any Sioux were nabbed, and Crow scouts would join up at the Yellowstone.

Bordon eyed everything joyously. Charlie Reynolds was ahead with the general. The swallow-tail guidons fluttered red and white. General Custer wore his fancy buckskin, a crimson kerchief flashing from his neck like a vivid bloodstain. The Custer stag-hounds ran the jackrabbits gayly. Presently the general's wife and Lieutenant Calhoun's wife turned back; they cantered down along the column, their eyes wet. Bordon glanced after them, smiling, thumbing the cavalry mustache he had been cultivating. No tears for him! By the time Margaret got his letter, the show would be over and his commission earned.

The day faded, and other days faded.

Here was the Tongue River, at the Yellowstone, and the lucky 7th in high fettle. Charlie Reynolds had been right. Now, with the wide horizons, all nervousness had died out.

Reynolds rode in from a scout to the southwest, bringing despatches from Major Reno. He looked weary, as he came from headquarters to the Troop C mess, and flung himself down beside Bordon.

"Injuns," he announced curtly. "Cold trail of a fair-sized village on the move up the Rosebud."

"How many?" Bordon demanded.

"Maybe 350 lodges. Fifteen hundred bucks, squaws and children. Sioux."

"Can we catch 'em?"

"We're making the try, soon as Reno joins up."

"Maybe they're making for the reservation," said someone nearby.

"In June? Huh! If you boys want a scrap, you'll get it," said Reynolds, and then shut up entirely.

Light marching order now. Troop pack trains with extra ammunition, no wagons. No gatlings. No troops from the 2nd Cavalry, camped up the Yellowstone, were needed. The 7th could take care of itself, and of any hostiles it might find.

Reports, rumors flew on all sides, that night. The trail would turn from the Rosebud, heading west. The bulk of the hostiles were somewhere on the Big Horn, and the 7th was to drive them into the other column. What in hell had become of the column marching from the south? No one knew.

"Drive them?" Reynolds laughed

softly. "The general is expected to locate them and then report. I don't see him doing it. Not him!"

"Just what do you see, Charlie?" Corporal Ryan asked.

The scout shrugged.

"What I see doesn't matter or I wouldn't be here," he evaded. "I'm just a scout and nobody cares."

"Aw, hell! You ain't afraid, and you with the 7th?" Ryan bantered. "And the general with his brother and cub nephew along?"

"Afraid? Huh." Reynolds turned his blue eyes. "You afraid, Bordon?"

Bordon's laugh rang out. "Not likely, Charlie! I've heard a lot of bullets that never touched me."

"Praise be, you don't hear the one that does." Sergeant Finley nodded cheerfully. "Come out o' the dumps, Charlie! Sure, I have a funny feeling my own self, from the bloody heart the cap'n got, and them domned hellhags yellin' when we left the post. But I see the 7th ridin' to Garryowen and glory, and our names in the papers. More by token, the newspaper felly says get out your letters tonight."

Kellogg, reporting for the New York *Herald,* was sending back his despatches by the supplies steamboat from Bismarck. Other mail? Everybody was scribbling tonight. Bordon scribbled with the rest, catching the contagion. After all, he was probably not even on the cavalry roll; might as well let Margaret know all possible. He reminded her again of the gipsy's prediction.

"Don't worry about me, dear," he concluded. "Remember, the reward is surely coming true! I'll do plenty to win it, too. I've plenty to fight for, and everything in the world to live for. By the time you get this, you'll probably see in the papers that Sitting Bull is on the run, with the 7th after him."

He had concluded his missive when he heard Baba, the first sergeant, call his name. An orderly was just leaving. Bordon was wanted at the captain's tent.

Tom Custer spoke to him brusquely.

"I'm sending my will out to the post for safe keeping. You will witness it. Sign your name here just under mine; you can testify to my name and act if necessary."

"You must think we're in for a fight, sir."

"If those Indians make a stand, we'll have to whip 'em damned well." Custer watched him write his name, and nodded. "Your name's good, anyway; same as on the infantry files. Half the men in the troop are enlisted under assumed names and don't write them twice alike."

Bordon smiled. "You don't expect to be killed, surely?"

"Anything may happen on campaign." Custer laughed harshly. "Had my warning from Rain-in-the-Face, didn't I? A marked man."

He tossed the jest aside and spoke more soberlyy. "If it does come to a finish fight, there'll be more men than officers left; can't be otherwise. You seem to play in luck." He eyed Bordon curiously. "Reynolds tells me you have your heart set on a commission. I've been watching you; we'll see after the campaign. Now, don't mention this business. You may go."

Bordon's heart was singing again as he went. Custer had been watching him, eh?

And Reynolds had again put in a good word for him. From such a man, these admissions were as good as a promise. Everything was surely shaping up.

Thursday, June 22nd. Centennial year; a big celebration in Philadelphia, but no Sioux and Cheyennes there. The 7th would celebrate in company with old Sitting Bull.

They were off up the Rosebud, on the trail of that village. The band, blaring its farewell from the bank of the Yellowstone, played the marching tune of the 7th, "Garryowen." The fast, rip-

pling old Irish air followed them with its glitter and lilt:

"Our hearts so stout have got us fame,
For soon 'tis known from whence we came;
Where'er we go they dread the name
Of Garryowen in glory!"

CHAPTER III

"SOJER, WILL YOU FIGHT?"

FIFTEEN days' rations on the pack mules. Fifty rounds to the man of carbine ball. One hundred rounds for the carbine and twenty-four for the revolver, in belt and saddlebags. Plenty of salt in each troop command. "We'll be eating horse meat if the bacon runs out," went the word.

The general was in a nervous hurry. Twenty-five miles, thirty miles a day. The Indian trail up the Rosebud turned across country for the next western divide. Here were the hills, all around.

"You are riding among hot hills." Bordon remembered the gipsy's words with a glow of startled recognition. And a battle, she had said. A battle, and his reward! That was certain now; Custer had more than hinted at it. Across the years, she had foreseen this very spot. Bordon's wonder at it all, passed into an easy, cheerful assurance. Security in the future girded him around. He had everything to live for now.

The trail widened. By the increase of the camps, there were more Indians; the number was hard to tell. Scores of *wickiups* showed—little brush huts, butts gathered to a peak like the play houses of children.

"Sure, they take good care of their dogs!" Sergeant Finley snorted, with a grin.

The Crow scouts knew better. Mitch Bouyer, their interpreter, corrected Finley.

"No, those are warrior lodges. The warriors stick their head and shoulders inside, leave their legs sticking out."

Articles from the reservation were picked up, a sure indication that these redskins were not from Sitting Bull's band, but were going to join him. How many? Where were they now? Men in the ranks had to depend on news filtered back from the scouts.

The troop was at evening mess again. Charlie Reynolds came in, riding heavily. He turned his horse into the herd on picket line, and sat down.

"Those Crows and 'Rees croak too much for me," he grunted. "Nearer they get to the Sioux, less they like it."

"What divide is this we're to cross?" asked Bordon.

"Little Chetiss, the Crows call it. Wolf mountains."

"What's on the other side?"

Bordon felt the swift side glance of the scout, burning with significance.

"Little Big Horn valley. The Injun name is Greasy Grass."

Greasy Grass! Bordon frowned, catching the implication. That was the name the boy had voiced, from his medicine vision.

"And then what?" struck in the sergeant. "Will there be enough Injuns yonder for a real fight?"

"You fellows raise a hell of a dust, but we saw smokes." Reynolds spoke in a weary, deliberate tone. "The 'Rees say we'll find enough Sioux in there to keep us busy two or three days."

"Them faint-hearts!" snorted Finley. "They'd ought to have stayed with their jibbering squaws. Sure, we haven't come in here with dry throats to waste time. One charge and twenty rounds will do the job."

"Here's hoping," and Reynolds shrugged. "We're fighting Sioux and Cheyennes, and God help the man caught with a dirty cartridge stuck in his Remington."

The Greasy Grass! Bordon frowned again. Only Reynolds and old Isaiah knew the promise of that name; queer

that the boy should have mentioned it. Then he shook off the momentary wonder, and relaxed. Orders were to be prepared for rousing at touch and word, ready for a march on over the divide before daylight.

THE night was calm, after a hotly stiff breeze. The men stretched out, chatting or dozing off. Bordon stared at the stars, uplifted, eager, vibrant, too restless to sleep. Tomorrow was Sunday. And battle—his day. Today, June 25th. His enlistment had expired, then; but nobody here knew it or cared. Tomorrow meant the start of new things for him. He had seen other battles, had come out of those, and would come out of this one. He had worked for this new day. Even Custer felt luck was with him, for some reason.

Rising stiffly, Bordon walked about. Far ahead a candle-light glimmered from a tent. By the hasty stumbling figures, officers were bound there; the general was holding a council. Bordon headed off for the trampled brush on the camp outskirts.

No guards were posted, except over the horses. The formality was useless in this rest halt, with the country well scouted. Suddenly Bordon's heart leaped, his hand went to his holster.

The dark form, blanketed, crouched low to the earth was only Isaiah, the old black squawman, goggling up at him. The whites of his eyes gleamed.

"What the devil are you doing here?" Bordon demanded, relaxing.

"Make my medicine, suh. Tomorrow we go to the Greasy Grass, sho'nuff. Three thousand Injuns there, suh."

"Seven hundred warriors, Ike. We'll make short work of them."

"No, suh! Three thousand warriors. The 'Rees know, but the gen'ral won't believe. The sign's right bad, it sho'ly is. You know about that sun dance lodge we passed? White man's scalp in it, sojer scalp. Sho' is death sign, suh. You hear about the gen'ral's flag? It fall down twice, pointing to back trail. Pow'ful bad sign, suh."

"Ike, I belive you're scared to death!" exclaimed Bordon, laughing.

"Yassuh, I sho' is, but I'm going." Isaiah's voice was gentle, resigned, controlled. "My woman at Standin' Rock, cry loud. I wear sojer clothes; the Sioux kill me same as my white folks. Same as Rain kill Cap'n Custer, and you too."

Bordon turned, with a laugh. "Not a chance, Ike! There'll be some killing, sure, but I'm safe. I've got stronger medicine than any Injun can show."

Isaiah had covered his head with his blanket and was mumbling a Sioux chant like a death watch. Bordon headed back with a cheery whistle. Queer, he thought, how much weeping and wailing and gloomy talk there was, these days. It had been different, back in the war days, when war really meant something and a ride like this would have been no more than an outpost skirmish! People had grown soft, these last ten years.

Near midnight, the column moved on. Jingle, jingle through the darkness, following an unseen trail winding through the ravines, along the ridges, and climbing by degrees. Halt again, before dawn, with the morning star brightening in the east. In the hills a vast empty silence, save for the champing of the horses and murmurs from the 'Ree scouts. Their medicine man, Bobtail Bull, was smearing their painted bodies with medicine oil.

"For'd, boys." Day had broken, the sun was up, a fine June morning and Sunday at that, when Sergeant Finley gave the order. "Barrin' a chaplain, we'll go to service with Settin' Bull. He's the Holy Joe for the Sioux, ain't he?"

Finley was a wag. The men laughed as they started their mounts; the laugh was good to hear.

The sun rose higher. Bordon cursed his mount. The beast was at a hobble,

and making bad work of it. Now the column was wending northward along the bed of a dry creek, before breaking down for the Little Big Horn. How far? Twelve or fifteen miles yet. Other side that next ridge, someone said.

Captain Custer's straight back, outlined by the buckskin coat of fancy trim like his brother's, led the troop. He had not been shot in that back, and would not be; all that grousing talk had evaporated with action. Occasionally, on ahead, Bordon could glimpse the general. His buckskin fringes, his yellow hair, short-clipped in Washington but now grown out a bit, marked him. The regimental colors of gleaming golden silk followed him, with the Stars and Stripes of the headquarters flag.

Schoolboy "Autie" Reed ambled beside his uncle. "Bos" Custer, the young brother, forage master for the trip, would be somewhere on hand. The staghounds ranged the gullies throatily.

Baba, the first sergeant, had an observant eye. He faced back through the dust swirls, catching the limp of Bordon's mount, and threw out his hand.

"Fall out and 'tend to the stone in that foot. Overtake us later."

Bordon reined aside and dismounted, reaching for his big clasp knife with its tool blades. A little matter, a mere trifle of gravel wedged in the horse's shoe, no doubt. He stood watching the troops pass, guidon by guidon; then he suddenly bent to his work. No gravel after all, but a sharp-edged stone, desperately wedged in.

The pack mules went past. He was alone, and the stone would not come out.

Incredulous, he worked on and on; should have had a farrier for this job. The horse was restive. Sweat trickled down his neck. He fanned himself with his slouch hat and cursed, profoundly but vainly; the cursing did not, somehow, do the trick as it should.

Bordon stooped again, prying and working at the angled stone. It came at last, and a good thing too; time had slipped by rapidly. When he stared around, the country looked suddenly lonely and desolate. The dust of the column hung high above the rolling brush and gravel, but the column itself was out of sight.

Mounting, Bordon found that the horse still limped from the bruise. The creek bed offered softer footing and he took to it. There was another sharp bend, opening into a long straightaway; there he pulled short.

Ahead, near the end of the straightaway, an Indian was off his pony, crouching, chopping at something with his hatchet. The blows crunching into wood sounded upon the still sunlight. A box of hardtack, lost from a pack and tumbled into the creek bed. One Indian, a young buck by his size, bronzy and sleek but with no warrior feather nodding on his round head.

Animal instinct must have felt Bordon's gaze. The Indian straightened up and stared, hand over eyes. A shrill yelp broke from him. He moved suddenly, leaped for his pony, was a-straddle and wheeling the animal.

Unexpectedly, a squad of troopers burst at a plunging trot from the bend ahead. They sighted the Indian, halted in a cloud of dust, then about faced and made back on the instant. The Indian vanished, scouring into the brush. Bordon realized the troopers must have been sent back to look for him. He shouted after them, but they were gone full speed to make their report of Indians.

Bordon sent his horse forward. He saw the young Indian again, on a rise to the right, reining his pony in a rapid circle. Bordon was almost at the box of hardtack when he descried the movement. He drew rein, knowing what it meant; and he was right. Other redskins appeared, from right and left, ahead of him; they cut out from the

dips, came hammering down to cut the trail. The first buck joined them in the charge.

Bordon acted on instinct. It would never do to be caught in this crooked creek bed, commanded from the banks. He whirled his horse about and raced back, for leeway and the open. The limp was gone, the animal ran well. At the first break in the bank, Bordon headed up and over. Pursuit whoops rang behind.

ON, through the brush. The valley narrowed here. Bordon crossed it and swerved into a draw; it led on like a pass through the hot hills. At worst, he thought, he could choose his position and make a stand, if they ran him down.

The draw forked, and forked again. The yelps behind him had ceased; he realized that the Indians had either been outrun or had gone amiss; probably the former. He headed on blindly until he came to an aspen-shaded spring. Halting here, refilling his canteen while the horse sucked greedily, he became assured there was no pursuit.

A laugh curved his lips as he mounted again. After all, he had nothing to fear. Luck was with him; probably those redskins had no rifles. He swiftly eyed the hills, made appraisal, and pointed his horse up the slope of the draw. Crossing the flanking crest, he rode down a long decline of gravel and brush for a broken valley below, and the Little Big Horn somewhere beyond, to the southwest.

He drew in his belt. The sun was past the noon mark, he presently saw. There was another divide ahead; the trail was longer than he had expected. Silence and desolation enveloped him like a blanket. The dust of the column still hung in the sunny blue, but now he descried another dust on the other side of that divide—a tawny, larger dust hovering high. An alarmed Indian village, eh? Pony herds being gathered in.

Three miles, at the least. Bordon pricked his horse and trotted across the broken plateau of the divide. Another shallow, rugged valley beyond, a ridge still to be crossed; no sign as yet of the river, the troops, or the village, save that high dust-cloud.

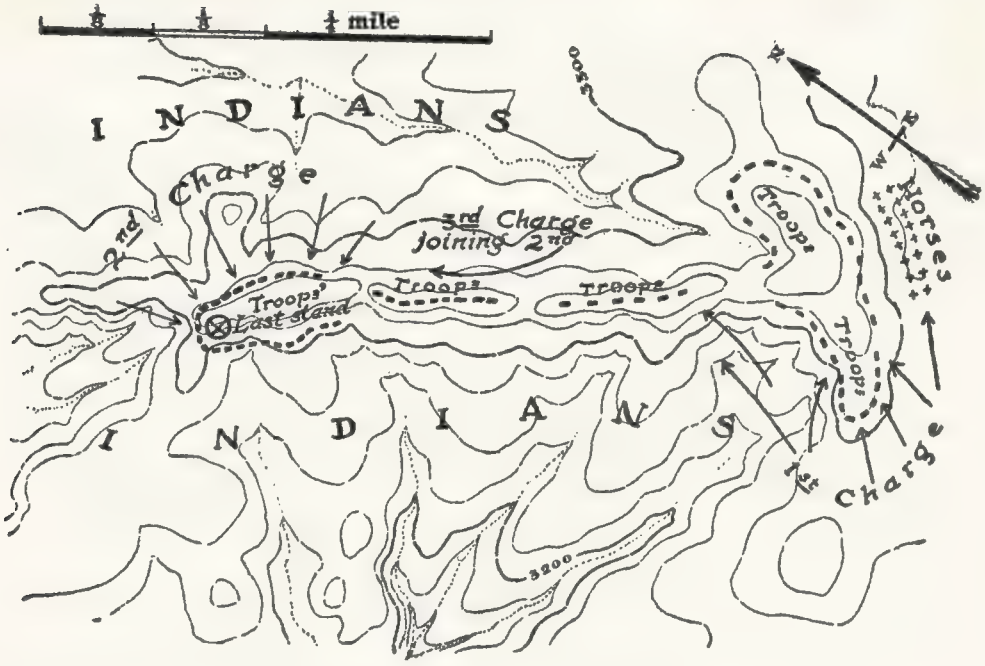
Ah! He stiffened slightly. A faint, clear, bugle-lilt—"Trot!" He quickened pace. On the other side of the rugged valley he struck into a fresh trail of shod hoofs, in column; it led him up a ravine, and he pushed his mount hard.

At last the view gradually opened. Through gaps in a lower ridge he caught glimpses of the timbered river ahead, crooked as a snake, and of clustered hide lodges, and endless vista of them to right and left. Confusion among them; lodges falling, figures racing and scuttling about—

Hurray! Excited, Bordon caught a glimpse of a blue column of fours at the trot, veering for the southwest where lay the village and the bluffy river bottoms. Troop guidons, regimental standard and headquarters flag—five companies, by the guidons and the intervals. A staccato popping like firecrackers came from up the river. With a hot curse, as his view was cut off, Bordon urged his horse on down the divide.

Presently he sighted an irregular line of low bluffs fronting on the river bottoms, half a mile or more distant; the trail swerved to left and to right again, as though seeking a pass through the washes and ravines to the river itself. And then Bordon choked, stared with blank disbelief, swore hotly.

Indians—God, what a host of them! Galloping down river, surging out of the village, thronging in masses for this higher land where the trail wound. And the cavalry again, for a brief glimpse. The bugle call "Dismount!" rifted the distant rattle of gunfire, somewhere far up the river. The cavalry seemed balked of the river. What did it mean?



Had the column been driven back? Bordon could be sure of nothing, until all at once he found things opening up, found a clear view out ahead.

There were two knolls of a ragged, bluffy ridge, with a spur between. Two troops were dismounting, evidently to hold the first knoll. The men running to position looked, from here, very small. The horses, whisked to the rear where two ravines flanking the ridge headed together, looked small in their bunches of four.

The other three troops had passed on. The Gray Horse troop was being dropped now. It was holding the ridge or spur connecting the two knolls. The remaining two troops swept on to take post upon the second knoll, facing the valley.

And there were the Indians again, flowing like a tide up along the flanking ravines. What the devil did it all mean?

Bordon had reined in his horse. He sat staring, in a sweat. Here was battle, but not such battle as he or anyone else had dreamed. Five troops, two hundred and fifty men, lost in that sea of yelling redskin hatred? Not a man would get away. For the fraction of an instant, he reflected that no one could say he had not been there; no one would know whether or not—

With a laugh, he slapped in his heels and sent his mount forward at a mad gallop. Here was the battle, his chance, the feat for which he would receive the reward so long sought! His luck was with him still. He could make it. His commission was waiting for him yonder!

As he plunged on and on, his eyes flitted; nothing now to bar his view. The gray-horse troop of Captain Smith was deployed along the short ridge or spur, extending from the second knoll toward the first. The second knoll, the one nearer the river bottom, was flying the two standards; General Custer was there, then. The two last troops were there, dismounted, their lines following the curve of the knoll. Troop C would be there, for Tom Custer would fight beside his brother. Bordon headed straight for it.

The low brush and bunchy weeds were jetting smoke. Balls from the long-range repeaters hummed like swarming bees. Horses were plunging, carbines were commencing to ring out; a low, roaring din of shouted orders and yelled taunts and farflung whoops filled the air.

Bordon, racing along, found himself between two fires. Past the first knoll now, then through the skirmishers and on up the slope of the second knoll. Luck was with him, of course. He saw the guidon of Troop C through the drift of smoke, and reined his horse into the thin line of troopers crouched with their arms through the bridle reins. He tumbled off with a laughing word of greeting.

"We been wondering," rasped Sergeant Finley. "Mind you hang to your horse. Shoot when you see a head, but don't waste a ca'tridge. The gen'ral has sent for the ammunition packs; had to leave the pack trains."

"Where's the rest of the outfit?" Bordon demanded.

"With Reno and Cap'n Benteen, for the upriver end of the village. By Gawd, we was to support 'em, but they'd better be supporting us."

"Where's Charley Reynolds?"

"Gone with 'em. If we could only have charged through to the river! Those damned ravines turned us. We're blocked off."

Finley shifted position, to squint with his carbine at the ready. A bullet slapped, a choked grunt escaped him. He slumped lower. His horse screamed, reared free, and ran down the slope to fall in a heap, neck doubled under.

ALL the knolled ridge was engaged now, and at this end things were getting hot. Bordon was in line, peering, firing; in the brief lulls as gunfire answered the roar of savage yelps, his mind registered swiftly flashing pictures. The flushed face of General Custer, standing near the headquarters flag, its folds jumping to the balls. The bearded features of Kellogg the news-man, kneeling with a carbine. The pallid countenance of Boston Custer the health-seeker, and the boyish Autie, crouched to the storm. The huddled hounds. Captain Custer and Lieutenant Harrington, moving here and there, cautioning the men. The low line of troopers, grimy, intent, cursing a miss, cursing the tugging horses, cursing the stuck shells, but never a man giving way except when lead dropped him.

All the flanks and the front were circled. Mounted warriors tore back and forth, shooting; they were hard to hit. A lower ridge to right and left sloped into the ravines; this was bad. Warriors sprang up from the cover of the down slopes, fired, and ducked. They, too, were hard to hit. None could tell how many Indians were in those ravines, which led up from the river. War bonnets, painted chests and faces, careening ponies, yells piercing the drift of powder-smoke. A pleasant Sunday!

And back east in Philadelphia, on the Centennial Exposition grounds, men and women were strolling about, listening to music, exchanging how-de-dos, sipping cool drinks in the shade, perhaps hearing a preacher expound of peace and good will.

"Sojer, will you fight?"

Bordon yelped out the old Bismarck taunt with laughing irony, and the men nearby laughed back as the hot carbines spoke a reply.

Every dead horse was a breastwork, now. The animals not killed had torn loose and had galloped off among the enemy, or were milling on the knoll. Suddenly came crisp orders.

"Two volleys, men. Reno is coming. We'll hurry him. Now! All together—ready, fire! Load! Again—ready, fire!"

The two volleys crashed, and the solid echoes went rolling. A storm of taunts came back from the outside. The Indians understood the signal, all too well.

Where was Reno? Where were those seven troops, with the pack train and ammunition? Bloodshot eyes peered in vain for that column driving a wedge of horse and man, smoking carbine and pistol, into the village. Nothing but spurting smoke, leaping figures, flailing bullets.

Lieutenant Harrington was down. Bordon saw him flat on his face, unmoving. Curiously, Bordon himself had no fear from the hot lead in the air; his confidence was complete. He glanced about and saw both standards down. The general was not there; he had hastened to the spur, where the gray-horse troop's carbines were ringing, to send off couriers to Reno.

Of a sudden came furious bedlam rising above the battle chaos. The horses under guard had stampeded. Bays and blacks pelted from the rear of the other knoll, reins dragging. Squaws and boys headed them for the river. Out there, beyond range, the Indian masses circulated freely—wave upon wave of them.

Another fury of voice and gun: the Indians had charged that other knoll. The mêlée was heard rather than seen, in between shots. God help the boys there! Troop L—that would Calhoun's. Bordon rose to look, and his heart stopped. They were gone, wiped out. Feathered horse and foot was pouring in a tossing wave right over the knoll.

The Smith skirmishers, thrown out along the connecting spur in knots of four, were shooting their gray horses for barricades. The troopers were done for; Bordon saw it at the glance. They had no support to rally upon, no chance whatever. A few gray horses frantically raced for the river and Reno. The blue figures topping them were swept off.

Two troops now; the dead, the wounded, the living. And no sign of Reno. He might be fighting through to reach them, but what with the whoops and shots and smoke, who could tell?

Time had passed. How long? Impossible to tell that, either, but Bordon was astonished to find the sun-light slanting down from the west. He rubbed his smarting eyes; the knoll was an island of smoke. Careless of the bullets, assured that none of them bore his name, he rose up again for a look. Upon the farther knoll, figures were cavorting among the dead, making sure work of it, snatching trophies.

Here around him, the end seemed to be a matter of minutes, yet no one showed any sign of fear. Not a whimper, not a blanched face, not even a prayer. Recruit and veteran alike were firing, cursing, holding on. He glimpsed a few strange faces; a number of refugees from the other troops had won through. Glancing around, he saw Smith of the gray-horse troop beside Custer, but bleeding, sagging, dying.

"Get down, you fool!" someone yelled at him, and with a laugh, Bordon sank down. He would get out of it somehow, that was sure.

He was unworried. Death might strike all around, but he was certain of his own future. There would be a way out. The worst could not happen, where he was concerned.

A lull now; the final charge was massing, the smoke was drifting away. Out on the field, squaws were gazing expectantly. Someone croaked a request for revolver cartridges. Bordon plucked a few from his waist and handed them over, without looking. He fumbled for more, found none, examined his own weapon; it was loaded in all chambers. He must have used the revolver without remembering it. Scant time was needed to spend a couple of dozen rounds, or a belt of carbine ball. The carbine loops also were flabby to his touch, the belt was light. He found an empty in the carbine chamber and tried to eject it, but the extractor had slipped past the head of the stuck shell. He reached for his knife, and then forgot

about it, as the attack began. Other things intervened.

Custer was bending over Captain Smith. Captain Yates was trying to set up the headquarters flag in the hard soil. A squad of warriors sprang waist-high and fired. Yates was down. Troopers spattered a volley, but the warriors were gone from sight.

In a sudden fury, balls of the Indian sharpshooters thudded and hissed all around. The general had straightened up; he knew what was coming. His voice trumpeted:

"Look out, men! They can't drive us. We're good for them. Hold out for Reno!"

His voice died. He was down. Tom Custer shouted and ran; the general was alive, had his revolver out, said something. Captain Tom caught the flag, and a bullet flung his right arm aside. He tried vainly to plant the flag.

Bordon was running, stooped, leaping across the clutter of dead horses and dead men, ringed by out-pointing weapons. The general had been shot in the side; his face was white, the revolver in his hand was cocked and steady. Captain Tom glimpsed Bordon and rapped out a harsh word.

"Set this flag up, Bordon. A signal for Reno—our position. The couriers didn't get through—"

Bordon tried and failed; the ground was too hard. No time for the flag now —they were coming! The general raised up a little.

"All right, Tom. You're in command. I did my best. There's been a mistake—"

Then the air rocked with whoops, with gunfire, with shrill chants from the squaws, with a rush. The down slopes smoked as the warriors sprang up and emptied their repeaters. With scramble of hoofs, the mob of horsemen boiled out of the ravine on the right; using whip and heels, they pounded up the slope of the knoll in a broadening front.

Paint and feathers, scowling faces, red nostrils of lathered ponies, brandished clubs and rifles! Carbines erupted and clattered in a burst of smoke. Revolvers were out and spurting. Men from the other flank shuttled over. The wild, mad charge was at the crest now. Rifles vomited downward, clubs fell and rose again, carbines warded and struck; men reeled back, and back. Every man for himself now.

Bordon's revolver jumped in his outthrust fist, and again, and again. He and Captain Tom were pent by a swirl of fighting men, forced into a common center. The jostle of rearing ponies and flailing arms climbed the reef of blue figures—was over. They shut out the sky as they swept on and over. For an instant nothing existed but this wild wave; a towering billow of breasting horses and painted flesh, which bore down everything in its path. Bordon saw a falling pony coming at him full tilt, felt himself knocked asprawl.

He was up, pistol still in hand, carbine at his feet. Men were cheering thinly all around. He peered into the smoke. The top of the knoll, here, was a litter; a dozen men remained, panting and staggering, forming again about this central point. Captain Tom was up, flaming erect, bleeding from a scalp-wound. The general was sitting up, smoking revolver in hand, his face wan and gray and old. Tom Custer smiled and nodded to him; something unuttered seemed to pass between the two men.

And all this in one moment's flash. The surge of warriors had been carried on only to wheel in a mob and come hammering back. On all sides, now. Another pack whooped in from the rear. This was the finish.

Again the sky was shut off. As the curling billow lifted and struck, Bordon saw one face that he knew. The fierce visage of Rain, heading the press. The ranks were so thick that muzzle and butt, club and hatchet, lacked space for

play. Bordon heard his own voice in a scream. "Look out, Captain! Rain! He's after you—"

Captain Tom heard it, or sensed, Rain was towering over him. The captain fired from his revolver; Rain fired from his thigh. The Winchester ball at two yards drove Custer flat on his back. Borne on by the raging press, Rain whooped high above the clamor and was lost to sight.

Bordon's view closed. Nothing now but the eddy of ponies and riders all around. Bordon knew it was the end, saw a warrior rise up to swing at him. He fired as the pony reared. He saw the warrior sprawl in the air—and then his head burst into fire. He did not know of the other redskin who had struck from behind in passing. He collapsed, and knew it was the end, and knew nothing more.

NIGHT, by the cold feel. Bordon blinked, able to see nothing. His head throbbed. He felt with his hand and found blood dried and caked over his cheek and scalp. He rubbed his eyes clear and still could not see. He was doubled on his side, and was enclosed, roofed over from right and left. A wickiup? No. By the sweaty smell, by the touch of his hand, he was roofed by dead bodies of men and horses. Something irked the flesh of his thigh, and he felt for it. A carbine. His own carbine, no doubt.

Momentary panic shook him as he tried to move. No sound was anywhere around; a deadly telling stillness was here. From some far distance came spasmodic rifle fire, and a din of chants, tomtoms, whooping yells. He remembered everything, and his panic passed, as he found that he could move.

With a quick breath he steadied himself and squirmed. He had the carbine, he could force egress; gradually he came clear into the cold night air. He was still on the knoll, and by the feel of the air, the night was almost spent. The morning star gleamed above the horizon. He was able to see, now; a distant ruddy flicker touched everything.

White blotches, amid a jumble of horse carcasses with legs stiffly jutting from the shadows. The timbered horizon of the valley was smokily lurid with fires that reflected here to the knoll; leaping flames dyed the dark timber, where the Indians danced victory.

Gradually Bordon's senses straightened out. Distant shots came from upriver. Soldiers there. Reno, beleagured in hopeless stand; hemmed in, fighting it out. Otherwise he must have come through to the rescue.

And he himself, Frank Bordon, one living man amid the dead! The fact struck home to him with realization. These silent white blotches were stripped bodies; here and there one had not been stripped; but all were dead. He looked more closely, and sickened. Hatchet and knife had been at work. In the glut of pillage, with squaws wrangling over the far-strewn spoil, they passed him by; or with the blood on his face and head, had thought him already scalped.

Mechanically, he had kept his carbine. He figured it, raised his head, looked around. Something in his pocket —he got it out, looked at it, put it back. A single carbine cartridge. He had missed it somehow, in the heat of the fight. Well, he might need it yet.

He remembered the visage of Rain-in-the-Face, rising in air, the two shots. Lifting himself, he picked his way to where he had last seen Tom Custer; one glance, and he turned away. Rain had come back; his knife had performed the promise.

The turmoil of voices in the far-spread village had lessened; the east was brightening. The fires had sunk low and dusk of dawn enveloped the hill, with its sodden odor of blood. Bordon's foot

caught in a tangle. It was the headquarter's flag, Custer's flag, jumbled into the brush and gravel by the charging hoofs. He saw that it was torn and darkly stained. He gathered it up and took it back with him to the cover from which he had squirmed. That little shelter of stiff death had not moved.

Daylight was heightening. Bordon found a canteen with a little water in it, and sucked greedily. He sank down again and tried to think, tried to plan a course. The racket in the village had ceased; the people there were exhausted. The firing upriver continued, carbines and Winchesters. It held promise. Reno was still there. If the Indians had finished their bloody pillage here, and were still held in check by Reno, they would not be likely to return here. And Bordon knew he could not get far in his present condition; the full day would soon be upon him. The best gamble, then, was to stay right here on the crimsoned knoll, and steal away under cover of darkness.

He crawled back into his deathly shelter and, when his throbbing head quieted a trifle, he fell asleep.

IT WAS noon when he wakened again, noon and after, by the sun. He had not eaten since the previous morning, and he had a raging thirst; no help for it, however.

No sound broke the stillness around him, except the harsh croak of birds. That meant no Indians near. All was safe. He wormed his way out of the shelter and then lay very quiet, drinking in the clean air, the warm sunlight. With night, he could steal away.

Along in the afternoon he realized that the firing had ceased. There was a lot of activity down below; warriors streaming at the gallop into the village. Not with scalp-yell and whoop of victory, however; no boiling excitement. Reno had whipped them obviously.

The sun sank, and Bordon chewed a pebble to relieve his thirst. Shrill squaw-cries drifted to the knoll; he saw the lodges in the village disappearing. Brown masses of horse herds drifted into the valley, dotted with gray—animals from the gray-horse troop. And then, into the nearing sunset, a great smudge of burning grass. Veiled by the smoke, the Indians were marching down the valley.

Bordon sprang up. Safe now, everything was safe! They were pulling out. This meant that they were licked. The other column would have scouts along here in no time. The ghost of his old laugh came to his lips. Everything was still shaping up!

The flag he wrapped about his waist. Carbine in hand, he paused to look around. Here they lay, the men he knew, face up, face down; along the ridge, the outflung skirmish line, each man silent and motionless behind his shot gray horse. Veterans and recruits, battered and bloody, splendid in death as they had been in action.

Then he faced about and was away, picking his way down the hill. The edge of the slope was marked by soldier dead, holding fast to their positions. On below, the grass was dotted with other white blotches here and there—men who had fought through, trying to reach Reno with the word.

Sudden joy flooded Bordon, as something moved. A horse, hobbling, sniffing and cropping. A cavalry horse, wounded but still serviceable. Fortune, born to fortune indeed! A final stroke of luck where most needed! Bordon quickened pace, heading for the animal across the ravine; and just then, he descried another moving figure.

This time, a mounted soldier in blue, emerging from a dip beyond the bottom of the hill, in the direction of the village.

A shout burst from Bordon. He ran down, plunging upon weak legs. The western glow was in his eyes, his legs

were unsteady. The rider was coming right forward, his long shadow cast before him by the level sun. At a canter, at a lope; now he was near, a scant hundred yards. Bordon's gaze focused, and he stopped short.

A scout? No. A hostile, on a cavalry horse, in plundered garb. Painted face beneath the slouch hat, Winchester in grip. A young fellow, a buck, slim as Reynolds but certainly a hostile. Now he sprang from his horse and sidled forward, Winchester ready.

Bordon glanced at the wounded horse. Too far! Then he remembered his one cartridge. Aye, here was the time for it! He threw up his carbine—and found a shell stuck there. For the first time, he remembered that stuck shell, and how he had reached for his claspknife at the instant of the final attack. The Indian read the futile gesture and lifted a taunting yell.

"I see you!" he cried. "I look for you. Now I wipe my face clean!"

The face—Bordon stared. Yes, it was the face with the cheek-scar like a puckering arrow. This was the boy he had knocked down that day at the agency. And the shell was still stuck. He saw the rifle rise, at sure distance.

Bordon's brain raced. No, no—it was impossible! This was not the reward—or was it? Dead, every one of them. And he himself, he would do it over again, as his best. He knew what no other man knew or would know—the simple greatness of those who had died, the stubborn bravery, the courage in despair. Men who could face absolutely certain death and never whimper. That was reward enough, that knowledge! Reward greater than he could expect or believe, to know such men, to know himself one of them. The gypsy had spoken the truth after all, only—

He saw fire-split smoke gush from the Winchester muzzle, and laughed. But he did not hear the bullet. Sergeant Finley had been right about that . . .

Statement of ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of March 3, 1933, of Adventure, published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1937. State of New York, county of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Harold S. Goldsmith, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of Adventure and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Editor, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor, none. Business Manager, Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owner is: Popular Publications,, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y., Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y., Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given;also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner, and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. Harold S. Goldsmith, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 11th day of October, 1937. Eva M. Walker, Notary Public, New York County Clerk's No. 288, Register's No. 8W329. (My commission expires March 30, 1938.) [Seal]—Form 3526—Ed. 1933.

". . . An' if you act smart, you'll go straight to hell!"

THE REDHEAD FROM TULLUCO

SECOND PART OF FIVE

By GORDON YOUNG

A POINTING finger, a shot without warning, a wounded man with hate in his eyes—that was Red Clark's welcome to Nelplaid, where he had ridden to take over the management of the Lazy Z ranch.

The wounded man was Sam Clayton, a big cattleman, who was the storm-center of that turbulent territory. But Red didn't know any thing about that. All he knew was that the four men who had started to shoot were no better than they should be, that the girl with Clayton was in danger, and that no man should be bushwhacked without warning. So he took a hand in the game, and when the smoke cleared four men lay sprawled in the dusty street, and Red Clark had become a Nelplaid legend—by escaping untouched!

Judge Trowbridge, of Nelplaid, had hired Red, on the strength of his being the son of one of the West's best lawmen, and after sizing up the situation, he knew that he would have to earn his pay.

For the owner of the Lazy Z, one J. C. Alvord, had inherited it from a rival of Sam Clayton's, had never even been out to see it, and expected Red to whip it into shape virtually alone. And cattle were disappearing—without trace and without punishment.

Before going out to the job, Red got one vivid sample of Nelplaid's strife-torn set-up. For Bill Clayton, grandson of the wounded man, had been told that Red had shot the old man, and a powerful group, headed by the sheriff, were ostensibly believing the story. Red confronted them, forced the instigator of the rumor to back down, and walked out a free man, but even as he did so, he knew that one thing was certain: unknowingly and by blind chance he had become a storm center of the rivalries and bloodshed that was raging in that district. And some of the men who had caused the recent killing were rustlers, and as such had made away with Lazy Z cattle.

It was going to be no job for a timid man.

BOBBY and Pete were in the house, noisily messing about, getting supper. Red went in and stood by the door. When they saw him they quieted down, self-consciously, not knowing yet just what this boss was like.

"Did you kids see a Mexican talkin' to Knox this mornin'?"

They said, "Yes."

"Did he say anything about what the Mexican told him?"

Both shook their heads.

Red went to the kitchen stove and looked at the fried potatoes that were burning, at the warmed over beans that were drying out, at the steaks that were getting hard and black and filling the room with smoke.

"This here," he said, "is like what I call home cookin'. Least, it is the same kind of cookin' I do when I make myself at home. Let's eat!"

The kids loosened up and as they ate they explained that their work was riding the hogbacks and running cattle down out of the timber. They gave no hint of liking Knox or of not liking him. They had heard of old Backman but had never seen him, and he had a bad name.

"In the morning," said Red, "you can show me which is the way to his place. I think I'll ride over and have me a look. I got to get acquainted around here."

In the morning the cook was up long before daylight, as a cook ought to be; and he made the banging and clattery noises that a cook does when he has to get up while other people are still asleep. His head hurt and he was cross as a sore-tailed bear.

He went out to the wash bench where Red was splashing like a duck in a mud puddle. "What all did we talk about while I was drunk?" The cook had a suspicious air.

Red blinked wet eyes and laughed. "About you bein' married, or not bein' married. I forget which."

He gazed with rheumy eyes at Red and twiddled the edge of his drooping mustache. "Did I talk about folks up in this country a-tall?"

"You talked about what a handsome feller I am and how you liked me."

"That just goes to show how whisky makes a fool of a feller. Don't you go bringin' any more up here, ever again. Only," he leaned a little closer, "sick as I am, there ain't nothin' that does as much good as another little snifter before breakfust. Have you got some more?"

Red laughed at him. "Say, pop, Knox was tellin' me about a nester named Backman that helps hisself to a cow

now and then. What about 'im?"

Cook fished in his hip pocket for his old corn cob pipe, stuck it into his mouth, cocked a watery eye. "Knox told you?"

"Right."

"I reckon old Backman would put a kid of about your shape and size into his skillet if he had a hankerin' for some red-headed meat. You let that old devil alone, son. Al did. And Al didn't back up from nobody—much."

"And Knox? Did Knox ask this old Backman to please not eat our cows?"

"Did Knox say so?"

"A little."

"I ain't goin' to call Frank Knox a liar. He is a bad man to argy with. For your own good," said the cook with a kind of bleary earnestness, "you wanta be polite to Frank. He is easy to get on with if you don't rile 'im. But he is pizen on legs if he takes some dislike to you."

After breakfast, which was finished long before the sun climbed above the wooded hogbacks, Pete rode down across the valley with Red and pointed out the way to the rough trail that led back up to where Backman had squatted down.

Pete reined up, ready to turn and leave Red. He spoke slowly, with a look as if he really wanted to do Red a favor. "I hear tell that this old Backman don't much like to have people pokin' around up where he has his stampin' ground."

"How you mean, Pete?"

Pete ran his fingers into the horse's mane. "I sorta have heard that *nobody* up in this neck of the woods, from old Alvord on down, monkeys much with that old long-hair."

"Um. Pete, you have got some bat-wing ears. Tell me, have you ever heard much about Mr. Alvord bein' in with a bunch that used to use this valley to coax Clayton cows to come and hide?"

Pete looked steadily at Red and shook his head a little. "Folks wear tight-cinched mouths up in this country, Red. We don't meet many people. Us kids, I mean. Knox kept me and Bob combin' the hogbacks on account of cows driftin' into the timber." He swept an arm vaguely. "It is mighty rough country. Mighty rough."

"Um," said Red.

Pete leaned over and looked down at the ground, then his eyes came up from under the hat brim and hovered on Red's face. His boyish mouth smiled cautiously. "You look like a purty good feller, Red."

"Um."

"Me and Bob was all set to quit."

"How so?"

"Something been funny. We don't earn our salt huntin' cows. And cows that used to be thick here in the valley, ain't no more. Knox said they went wanderin' back up in the mountains and kept us ridin' to hunt 'em out."

"I see what you mean, Pete. Did you by happenchance mention something about it to the judge a while back?"

Pete nodded. "He knowed our folks. If we'd kept still, he might have come to think some time that we kept our mouths shut on purpose."

"Is there anything you can put your finger on?"

"No, only you tell me why would cows leave a valley like this to wear their legs off climbin' hogbacks?"

Red grinned. "Maybe this old Backman puts 'em in his skillet. I'll ride over and ask him."

RED rode on into steep country over a rocky trail. It was pretty, but he wasn't much of a nature lover—except as nature had fitted the scenery to fatten cows. He gave the horse its head, rested his hands on the horn, thought things over, grunted reflectively. It was maybe a big waste of time to come over here to talk to old Backman, but having made a start, Red could not turn back. The kids might think he was afraid of the old long-hair.

It was still and drowsy on the pine-covered hillside, and hot. The horse tipped forward its ears and raised its head.

Red alertly looked up and a rifle blazed at him from across the top of a boulder about fifty yards ahead. Red saw the smoke—then he was bareheaded. His hat had been shot off.

He threw away the reins, jerked his feet from the stirrups, and flung himself out of the saddle to take what cover he could before the rifle went off again; but as he left the horse with reckless sidelong fling, a spur raked the Devil's rump and the horse jumped, its shod feet rattling on the loose rock. After a few jumps the horse stood to the dragging reins, head up, ears forward.

Red, down on the ground with one arm under him and the other hand already at a gun's butt, peered into a leveled rifle in the hands of a tall shaggy old long haired, long bearded man in a fringed buckskin shirt who rose up from behind the boulder.

The old fellow cocked his head and called out, "So *you* are that there bad man what was comin' to run me off my place, are ye?"

Red didn't move. His hand was on the revolver and the revolver was clear of the holster, but he lay motionless on a bent elbow and just looked. Old Backman had a kind of serenity, no bad temper; just the calm assurance of a man who has always been able to take care of himself, and felt that he always would.

Red guessed that here was a genuine leftover from the frontier trapping days.

Red lifted his head a little, shouted, "Damn poor shootin', dad! Why didn't you wait till I got a little closer? Maybe you could've hit me!"

Mr. Backman held the rifle one-handedly and stroked his beard with the other hand, bent forward a little, peering. "You fuzzy-eared cub, you! I took off your hat 'cause I wanted to see the color of your hair." He called it "har." His voice was slow, deep and smooth. "You looked so danged young, I didn't think you could be that feller. But it is red, like Knox said it would be. Well, here I am, waitin' for to be run off!"

Red poked the revolver's nose into its holster and sat up.

Old Backman didn't say anything about Red putting up his hands or not touching his guns; and Red, who had known old-timers, many of them his father's best friends, knew what that meant. This tall shaggy old fellow with the slow, almost gentle voice, was willing for Red to try all the fast shooting that he wanted to.

Red got to his feet. "So Frank Knox told you a red-headed badman was comin' to run you off?"

"Purty smart young 'un. You understand English." The old fellow had a good natured mockery. "How it come a cub like you that ain't quite dry behind the ears—" he called them "airs"—"sets hisself up for to be a badman, anyhow? Two guns and all. With a rifle under his leg. I was mighty skeered."

Red grinned. He knew what he was up against and didn't mind. He had come over expecting to find a morose old nester who was soured on cowmen, and he had run into an old-timer who didn't give a damn about cowmen.

"Dad, I ain't very smart some ways, some times, but I never set myself up as a bad man."

"Ho, no?"

"No!"

"That is plumb queer, ain't it? Knox come a-rarin' over here yesterday afternoon sayin' I was to pull stakes and git or he'd have his special red-haired hell-fire-eatin' bad man that had been fetched all the way from Tulluco on purpose to run off folks, pay me a visit. I allus welcome vis'tors. So I set here

on the trail to say 'Howdy.' You looked so danged much like a fool kid that I thought I'd best have a look at your hair before I got real ser'us. And you got two guns tied to you. Why?"

"I'd rather lose a leg than one of them guns. You keep a leg tied to you so it won't get lost or something. I keep them guns thataway. They was my dad's."

"Well, either you or Frank Knox is a-lyin'. And accordin' to all of what I hear, Frank he is honest and truthful and mighty full of courage. Leastwise, that is how he tells it."

Red felt hot and itchy, but kept on grinning. "So far, dad, the joke is on me. But have you got some time and a good horse, and will you poke my nose toward Frank Knox's ranch?"

"I got all the time in the world and a good horse. Also legs that has tramped farther than any horse alive. What you aimin' at?"

"Do you know the way to Frank Knox's place?"

"So far I been able to find my way to wherever I wanted to git to."

"Well, dad, I aim to have a little talk with this Mr. Knox. I'd like for you to hear what I say."

Old Backman cocked his head to one side. He had bright eyes. Unlike most of the grizzly old-timers who had lived lonely lives, he was not sour and sullen, but had a sparkle of good nature. "You mean maybe Knox has been up to one of his cute tricks?"

"Purty cute, dad."

"Why he want me to shoot you, you reckon?"

"Judge Trowbridge there in town sent me out to be new boss of the Lazy Z, and Knox took it friendly-like, seeming. But he said you had a habit of eatin' Lazy Z beef, and that I'd better ride over and ask you not to. So I come."

The old fellow chuckled. "Mosey along up closer, son. Where I can look at you good. I got a sorta liking for young 'uns."

Red went up, walking with pegleg stiffness on high heels over the rocky trail. He stopped before the tall old man whose rifle lay on his forearm with no menace, except such menace as was in the readiness of a man who knew what he could do with a rifle. Then Red saw that Mr. Backman was even wearing moccasins.

"Now why should I want to eat beef when deer come right down to my door so thick I have to throw rocks to keep 'em away?"

"I only come up here yesterday, dad. I don't know anything about this country."

"Frank Knox, he is a purty hard man," said Mr. Backman.

Red snapped, "He ain't! Hard men don't work cute tricks for to get somebody they don't like shot!"

Mr. Backman thought it over, stroked his beard, nodded a little. "I reckon you can think straight. Lots of folks can't. That is sure a nice horse. Get your hat, bring your horse, and we'll go along up here to my place and have a snack and git a little acquainted."

The cabin was square, of rough hewn logs, chinked with mud and moss, with a mud-and-stick chimney. It was clean and snug and in order. He had built the cabin and furniture himself, which wasn't unusual; but he had built it with a care and neatness that was. He took off the pine needle mattress to show, proudly, his bunk springs of interlaced rawhide.

"I sleep outdoors, mostly. Except in the rain." He chuckled deep in his beard. "I did oncet in the rain last spring when a purty girl come to see me. I ain't yit so old that I don't like for purty girls to like me!"

He was straight as a rugged old pine, and had been trapper, buffalo hunter, used to loneliness.

"I allus liked kids and women," he said simply. "Nice little shavers that sorta worship you, and women—any

size." He shook his head, smiling. "I ust to think that when I got me some gray hairs I would have some sense. But they can still tie me around their little finger. This one has shore done it proper. Or maybe not real proper a-tall, hm?"

"Me, I like women fine, too," Red admitted. "They is one in this country that I sure like. Her name is Miss Clayton."

Mr. Backman gave him a keen look. "How you come to know her if you are new to the country?"

"I seen her in town."

The old fellow scratched his head and in an amused voice, "Son, let's you and me pitch in together and lick a big handsome feller. She likes him too good for us to have a chance."

"You mean Jim Brady?"

"How you come to know him, too?" Mr. Backman was getting doubtful about Red's being so new to the country.

"Who is he, dad?"

"Oh, Jim is just a feller. What do you think of him?"

"Seems all right."

"'Seems'. Hm. I wonder sometimes. How you come to know him?"

"I don't. Only it was thisaway. There in town some men was shootin' at old Sam Clayton. They shot him in the back before the general store."

"Sam?"

"And when he went down that girl she jumped right out of the store door and throwed herself down on top of him, like she would rather be hit than him. So I know she is all right."

"They kilt Sam?"

"Purt-near, I reckon."

"Who done it?"

"They was four of 'em and—"

"What happened to 'em?"

"There was some shootin' for a spell, and only one rode off. The other three was buried. A good lookin' feller come up and shook hands with me and he said his name was Brady, and that the man who rode off was Mell Barber."

Mr. Backman eyed Red, keenly. "He come up to you and said his name was Jim Brady?" That was hard to believe.

"Right, dad."

"Why?"

"My gun, it had joined in the argument."

"Oh," said Mr. Backman. "But Mell Barber got away?"

"You know him, dad?"

"Know about him some." He tossed back his long hair, scowled. "Why you reckon they shot Sam thataway?"

"Some say they are a bunch of outlaws. I imagine a man like Mr. Clayton thinks that the scenery is allus made purtier by some little piles of dirt on an outlaw's belly. Me, I do!"

"Hump," said Mr. Backman.

They had their snack of bits of venison roasted on the tip of green sticks held over coals; and it was good. They drank cool spring water. Mr. Backman smoked a pipe and Red a couple of cigarettes.

"So you want to go have a talk with Frank Knox?"

"Um. He said for me to come and see him any time."

"'Tain't far. 'Bout seven miles or a little more."

"You got a horse, you said."

"Legs is better. I use a horse mostly only for to pack."

The old man's long legs and moccasined feet took the trail easily, much to Red's amazement. Red hated walking, thought other people should. And he didn't like the timber, with its perpetual shade as if night were coming, and the denseness that kept him from seeing far.

He did not like the rough wooded country, for it was hard on horses and men on horses.

THE trail Mr. Backman was using came to an old road, not much used, that wound its way up the valley; and Red at

once noticed that quite a few cows had come that way recently.

"See 'em?" asked Red, pointing to the tracks.

Mr. Backman looked at him in mild disgust. It was just about like asking a school teacher if she could read the alphabet in big letters.

"How many you figger, dad?"

"'Bout twenty."

"Are you thinkin' what I'm thinkin'?"

"Mebbe so."

"From things you know about the lay of the land, does it surprise you any?"

"Not a great much."

"Then mebbe my visit over here to this Mr. Knox is sorta business instead of just personal, hm?"

"Knox is a hard man to do business with, some ways. Still, if Jim Brady shook hands with you there in town, I got a notion why Knox steered me onto you. He don't like me. He don't like you. He figgered that whatever happened between us would make him feel purty good."

"Yeah, but ain't he goin' to be surprised!"

A half hour later when they looked from the timber toward a small clearing where there was a cabin, a shed that was used as a stable, and a small corral, Mr. Backman said softly, "This here is the place," and looked up as if to see how Red felt now.

"And there are *cows* in that horse corral!" said Red, poking out an arm.

"They do look a bit like cows. Only you can never tell. Mebbe Knox has stuck some horns on horses."

"If they're wearin' Lazy Z's, this Knox is halfway to hell!"

"Careful, son. He may be layin' for you!"

Red's idea of being careful was to kick the spurs into Devil's flanks. The horse threw back its ears and leaped forward, bound on bound, then under high pull of reins skittered haunch-down to a stop alongside of the corral. Red rose in his stirrups, peered over the top rail, and saw about twenty cows. Those broadside of him were branded Lazy Z.

Again he put spurs into the horse's flanks and rode headlong for the cabin.

The door was open, and Knox's bare head came poking out. His black hair was slicked down. His face had a silly sort of scared look when he saw that it was Red. It was just as if he had been sure that only somebody friendly would come riding up at full gallop, but Red's eyes had a glitter that wasn't friendly.

Knox was half minded to jerk his head back inside the house, but Devil's head flew up under the pull of the reins, and he settled on his haunches with forefeet braced right at the door. Red flung away the reins and piled out the saddle, his eyes on Knox; and Knox could see that Red meant to come on right into the house after him, so he stepped out with his hand well away from the gun.

"Hello, kid!" he said, smiling, but his black eyes were staring. He talked fast. "I was just comin' over to the ranch with that bunch of drifters I found wanderin' over here and shut up in the corral."

Red's words cracked with the sound of a whiplash. "You're lyin'!"

That set Knox's head back as if he had been hit by a fist. His black eyebrows came together in a frown. "You're mighty reckless in how you use words!" His beady eyes fastened on Red's face as if studying whether or not to risk the draw, but there was something in the blaze of Red's face that seemed to confirm the warning that had been in Dave Gridger's message. So Knox picked out a tune that sounded more hurt than mad. "Here me, I took nearly all mornin' bunchin' them cows that had wandered off their range into the corral so I could drive 'em back over where they belonged, and now you—"

Red let go with, "Feller, you drove 'em from our range last night! You've kept Bobby and Pete ridin' hogbacks so they'd be out of the way and not see

"So you are that there bad man!"

the goin's on you've done. You are a damn cow-thief!"

"No man can call me that and—"

"I'm not wearin' skirts and I did!"

"Now listen, young feller, I don't want no trouble with a fool kid!"

"I want some with you! And I ain't no kid. I'm boss of the Lazy Z and you stole my cows. You're wearin' a gun. And if your arm is broke, why don't you put it in a sling!"

Knox gulped.

"Now see here," he said. "You are makin' a big mistake if you think I would run cows from anybody's ranch! Why, I been workin' myself sick over to the Lazy Z, tryin'—"

Knox broke off. He was too dark-skinned to grow pale, but he looked really sick as he caught sight of shaggy old Mr. Backman coming up toward the cabin door with his rifle in the crook of his arm.

Mr. Backman walked up noiselessly in moccasined feet, and said coolly: "Why, howdy, Knox."

Knox set his mouth tight and stared uneasily.

"I am beginnin' for to see," said Mr. Backman, "just why you wanted some-

body to shoot this here boy for you. You don't 'pear to be particklar anxious to do it yourself!"

KNOX sagged against the side of the doorway and scowled.

Red squirmed, not knowing what to do with a man that would turn belly up and not fight. He frowned at Knox, spoke to Mr. Backman:

"Dad, onc't I grabbed a mouse and the little devil, he scratched and bit my fingers. He wasn't much bigger 'n my thumb and he knew he couldn't lick me, but he was willin' to make it a fight. And he made such a dang good un I was glad to turn him loose. Then I got some cheese and put it where he could find it, for to show no hard feelin's. A mouse'll fight. Some men won't!"

Mr. Backman set his hat back on his head, stroked his beard solemnly. "Mr. Knox here has took a lot of trouble for some years now to make folks up in this country think he is a bad man to monkey with. I'm real surprised."

"Up in Tahzo and Tulluco," Red explained, "when you cornered a rustler, you had to kill 'im and do it in the smoke. He never turned up his belly and waited for to be hung!"

Knox stiffened and a wild look filled his black eyes.

Red saw the look, but it wasn't his nature to talk just to make somebody more scared. Readily he said, "Just between you and me, dad, we can't hang 'im like he orta be, 'cause folks might say it was spite. If there was a bunch along to say it was right, I'd be willin'." He had kept his eyes on Knox. "You, feller," he said, "have been drawin' wages to work for the Lazy Z. And you have been stealin' Lazy Z cows. It was you, I bet, run off the other bosses just so you could get to be boss yourself and steal more. But I can't shoot you like I orta, or hang you like you orta be!"

"You goin' to turn him loose?"

"Hell, no! I'll take him hogtied clear into Neplaid and turn him over to the judge!"

"Hm," said Mr. Backman, meditatively. "I reckon he'd purt-near rather be shot."

"He can get hisself shot if he wants. He's still wearin' a gun!"

Knox took some deep breaths and set his teeth. His dark eyes had a snake-like glaze, as if he were so full of poison that he would like to bite, but he did not speak.

Red pulled the gun from Knox's holster, looked down at the gun. "One, two three—huh—four. Liars, I bet, can file notches as well as steal cows!" He prodded out the shells and put Knox's .45 into his saddle bag. "Now come along. I'll saddle your horse."

The old frontiersman, tall and calm, looked on. The rifle lay in the crook of his left arm. He followed Red and Knox on noiseless feet across to the shed where two horses were tied. The fringe of the buckskin skirt stirred in light ripples as he moved.

"Knox, stick your hands out behind you," Red said. "Which horse you want?"

Knox sullenly did not stir.

"Suit yourself, feller. But if I have to lay a gun barrel over your head, I'll tie you belly-down across your saddle, and you'll stay there! Put your hands behind you!"

Knox thrust his hands out stiffly behind him and Red tied the wrists.

"Now get in this saddle. I'll boost you up. If you kick or act smart, you won't go to Nelplaid. You'll go straight to hell!"

Red supported Knox's back while he raised a foot way up to the stirrup, then Red heaved and Knox swung up, throwing the other leg over the horse. Red hobbled his feet under the horse's belly, then he made a hackamore of the rope that was coiled on Knox's saddle and threw the end to the ground.

The horse stood still while Red opened the corral to let out Lazy Z cows.

At first they looked about, bellowed a little as if asking one another questions, but after they were pointed along the road that led down into the valley they began to move as if they knew where they were going.

Red rode back for Knox and Mr. Backman handed up the rope from the ground that was tied to Knox's horse; then he walked along beside Red's horse, not saying a word.

When they came to the trail over which he had brought Red from his cabin, he said, "Son, I'll leave you here." His sharp old eyes twinkled. "I purt-near think what Knox told me about you bein' a hell-fire-eatin' redhead from Tulluco is some near the truth."

He flung up his hand in parting, gave Knox a look, and set off along the trail with an easy stride. His hair was down to his shoulders, his white beard swept his breast. The mountain trail was already darkened by the setting of the sun behind the western hills.

IT was in the starlight that Red, riding slowly, pushed the cows right along up close to the ranch-house. The boys and cook came out to see what was up. They had been wondering for hours what might have happened to Red. Cook took the pipe from his mouth, rubbed his nose on an elbow.

"He ain't alone."

"Where'd he roust out all them cows? Do you reckon from up at old Backman's?" Bobby asked, breathlessly.

The keen-eyed Pete spoke up. "That looks like Frank Knox!"

They were standing outside the door as Red rode around the cows and came up, leading Knox's horse, with Knox stiffly in the saddle, his arms behind him.

Cook stuck out his scrawny neck. "What's all this mean?"

"These cows was in the corral at Knox's place," Red said softly." I fetched 'em home. I'm takin' him to town in the mornin'."

The two kids looked at each other and whistled softly. Cook took out a dirty plug, whittled, nervously crumbled the cuttings between his palms. When he lit the pipe he held the match so long that flame nipped his fingers.

Red walked to Knox's horse, loosened the hobbles and carefully coiled the rope about the horn of Knox's saddle.

"Light down," he said.

Knox came off the horse with awkward kick of leg over the cantle and belly bent over the saddle. His hands being tied behind him, Red steadied him to the ground.

"You boys grain the horses. Cook, we want some supper. Come along, Knox."

Cook's voice carried mingled reproach and warning. "Red, you are clear crazy!"

"I allus am when folks rustle my brand."

"Your brand?"

"She's *my* brand when I draw wages to ride herd on 'er!"

Knox eyed the cook with a sullen stare, somehow expectantly, but cook was having trouble with his pipe and would not meet Knox's black eyes.

Red took Knox out behind, stood about six feet off, let him give himself a long thoughtful wash, then followed him back into the house. For all of his gabbiness, Red could be silent, and he was satisfied that Knox was hurt clear down deep at being a prisoner before these men where he had been boss. Red's mind was made up that Knox should have even more humiliation. A rustler that wouldn't fight was about as low as a fellow could get.

When the kids came back from the stable, Knox was sitting on a bunk. His wet hair was combed sleekly back, the comb's teeth-marks showing. He rolled a cigarette, lit it by drawing the match

along his pant's leg, stared at nothing.

Cook puttered nervously about the stove, getting the warmed-over supper ready, now and then taking a furtive look at Knox, a longer look at Red as if trying to make up his mind about something.

When supper was ready, Red said, "Move along up, Knox, if you want to eat." Knox looked up under a black-browed scowl and did not reply. Red said, "Suit yourself. Eat or don't!" Knox stayed where he was, as if he were so mad that he thought not eating would spite somebody.

Red went to the table, moved the lamp and sat facing Knox across the long dim room. He ate like a hungry man. The cook shuffled near, muttered as if giving the best advice he knew: "You're playin' hell, you are!"

"Make about two quarts of coffee. The kind that will take the hair off a green hide. I'm settin' up tonight."

Cook fiddled with his buckskin suspender, dabbed at the ends of his straggling mustache, and he sighed noisily. Then he poked wood into the stove, building up the fire to boil water for more coffee.

Red, still at the table, told Knox to pull his boots and pile into the bunk. He told Bobby and Pete to hang their guns on pegs behind the stove, and to set the cook's rifle there. Red wanted all the guns where he could have an eye on them through the night. He had the cook fill one of the lamps with coal oil so that it would burn until morning. He turned the lighted wick low and put the lamp on a stool in a way that cast a glow on Knox's bunk. Then Red sat on at the table with the sugar bowl and coffee pot in front of him, keeping watch.

The kids rolled in and for a while they tossed recklessly, unable to doze off. The cook puttered about, fingering his buckskin suspender as if wondering what would happened if it broke. Two or three times he looked as if about to say something. He kicked off his shoes, sat on the bunk and scratched himself thoughtfully. He filled his pipe but did not light it. After a time he got up and shuffled barefoot to where Red sat.

He said in a slow mumble, "Take him in, if you want, kid. You are a damn fool—but kinda in the way I like to see a feller be! But don't come back out here." He peered with bleary earnestness. "You'll be dry-gulched!"

The cook shambled off, crept into his bunk.

RED sat in semi-darkness, smoking and watching. Time dragged. The cook snored. Red drank coffee that was half sugar, rolled cigarettes. He could have tied Knox up and probably have found him there in the morning after a fair night's sleep; but more probably the cook would have turned him loose.

The night silence was filled with a mournful stir of wind, and the squeak and creak of tiny night creatures. Some field mice pattered about faintly, looking for crumbs. Red kept his eyes open. Sometimes he paced back and forth to rest his legs, tired of sitting; sometimes he leaned against the wall. He was pretty sure that Knox was not sleeping, but lying there, hopefully watching for a chance to do something.

Somewhere near midnight Bobby got up, yawned, rubbed his eyes, asked, "Can I get a drink?" He went in a sleepy stagger out to the pump, drank, came back and sat down beside Red, used Red's papers and tobacco.

"Listen, Red. I think you are all right."

"Thanks, kid."

"You ain't so much of not a kid yourself!"

Red grinned. "Hope I never ain't!"

Bobby went back to his bunk. The cook sizzled and spluttered as if being choked in his sleep. Far off, some coyotes yap-yapped, shrilly as if scream-

ing. Red drank more coffee. A low voice called. It was Knox.

"What you want?"

Knox sat up. "I want to have a talk."

"Go ahead."

"Can I come up to where you are?"

"Do no good."

"I wanta say something confidential."

"Come if you want, but act careful. I'd hate to have to get up a sweat in the mornin' digging a grave."

Knox swung his feet over the bunk's edge, looked to where Red was. He half raised his hands and walked slowly to the edge of the table across from Red.

"Don't take me to town!"

Red looked at him steadily. He could not see Knox's face very well, but he knew that the shame of going into town as a prisoner had broken down his sullenness. He had put in some hours studying how best to talk, and now he sat down, leaning his cheek on a fist.

"Red," he went on in a careful, half friendly tone, "I've got friends."

"Sure. Gridger and maybe the sheriff, and a bad bunch back in the hills that rebrands cows and runs 'em out from your ranch!"

Knox didn't say anything for a time, but he was shaken. Finally he blurted out: "Old Backman was lyin' to you!"

"Old Mr. Backman didn't tell me that. You fixed it cute, didn't you, to have him shoot me? And he near did. You ain't the first rustler I've locked horns with. I know you don't eat them cows you run off. And I know how stole cows are handled. I know that Gridger and the sheriff are relations by marriage. I know Gridger sent you out a letter about me even before I got here. Them was your friends that tried to kill old Sam Clayton, else why was Gridger in such a sweat to have you know what happened?"

Knox thought it over. Red had tried to knock the breath out of him, but it didn't work that way, for Knox said in a sort of crafty low tone, "If you know as much as all that, then you know I won't ever be convicted for rustlin', don't you?"

"I bet my neck you won't!"

"Then will you listen to a bargain?"

"I don't make no bargain with a man I don't trust."

"I can show you how to get some money and make yourself be real famous!"

"All the what you call fame I want is for the man I ride for to say I sure earn my wages. All the money I want is them same wages."

"You ain't been here long," Knox said after a spell. "Have you heard of the Kilco bunch?"

"Um. A little. Why?"

"They is a big reward for that Kilco. Wouldn't you rather take in an outlaw like Kilco and collect two or three thousand dollars than me?"

"If he starts stealin' my cows, I'll take him in!"

Knox sneered a little. "You sure do talk mighty fine!"

"'Longside of how you act, that mouse that bit me was purty big!"

"I can tell you where to find this Kilco. I know him. Know how you—"

"Then why ain't you got yourself some honest money, and some of that fame? Why try to help a feller like me that you shoot in a minute—if I wasn't lookin'?"

Knox leaned forward. "I'm tellin' you honest, Red!"

"Go back to your bunk. First place, I don't believe you. Next place, if I did, I wouldn't make a bargain. Go on—git!" Red waved a hand.

Knox stood up with hands on the table and braced himself as if to jump right across it; then he said between clenched teeth, "You'll be damned sorry!"

He turned and walked back as if a little drunk, threw himself down heavily on the bunk and Red drank sugared coffee and wished for morning.

IT was near noontime and the day was hot when Red rode into Nelplaid with the lead rope of Knox's unbridled horse in his hand. Knox was in the saddle, arms turned up behind his back, feet hobbled under the horse's belly, and his holster was empty. Knox must have reasoned that he couldn't hide himself behind his lowered hat brim, so he sat straight, with head up.

People said, "Gosh A'mighty!" Some called out, questioning. There was a running about in and out of doors, and up and down the street, telling other people to come and look. Red kept at a walk.

Dave Gridger, with his apron on and a half-smoked cigar in his puffy mouth, was at the door of the saloon, looking spider-fat and watchful. He and Knox exchanged long looks.

A team and wagon was before the general store. A lanky nester and his skinny wife were carrying provisions to the wagon. The woman screeched, "Why that there is Frank Knox!"

The sheriff and some other people who had been eating at the Saginaw Restaurant came bursting out of the door and trotted down the rickety sidewalk. Small Jody Blanton ran faster than the men.

The sheriff, out of breath, came up.

"What's all this? What's all this?" said the sheriff, puffing. He liked to look well before a crowd and had his shoulders back.

The judge's bald head came out of an upstairs window to see what was going on. "Red!" The judge had half of his short pudgy body through the window, almost ready to fall out. "What's the meaning of this, Red?"

Red lifted his voice so everybody could hear. "I found twenty-two Lazy Z cows in Knox's horse corral. I drove 'em home and brought Knox here along into town. He is going to say they strayed over to his range and he rounded 'em up to shove 'em back, but he is a liar. They was drove in a bunch off our range. I seen the trail!"

The judge rubbed the top of his head with a pudgy palm. "Why—I can hardly believe—" He broke off uncomfortably.

"If you don't, I'm quittin'!" Red lashed.

"No, no, Red. I believe—but since when did *you* take to arresting rustlers?"

"When they turn belly-up and won't fight!"

The crowd hummed and murmured, gazed at Knox, and Knox looked just about as if he were being jabbed with splinters all over.

"They are your cows," Red told the judge. "I've told you what is what. Here he is!"

The judge rubbed his head with the other hand. He did not look happy. His eyes searched the crowd, fell on the sheriff's up-turned face. The judge said with dignity, "Sheriff, you take the prisoner. We'll prefer charges. And Red, you come up here. I want to talk to you."

Red pitched the lead rope into the sheriff's out-stretched hand.

"He's all yourn. But I give notice here and now if the law don't take care of him, I've brung in my last rustler alive! The others are comin' in belly-down under a diamond hitch!"

Among the crowd that looked on was a tall man, a stranger to Nelplaid, whose lean face was weather-wrinkled and sun-blackened. He had deep-set eyes and they had the look of polished steel. He was straight as a ramrod, with some gray in his hair. He wore a suit of store clothes and had his coat on, and there was a bulge at the hip under the coat.

He kept well back. His lean weather-wrinkled face did not move a muscle.

When Red disappeared up the stairway to the judge's rooms the hard-faced man stepped to the other side of Red's black horse and gave a long look, rubbed his chin with a forefinger as if wondering a little about something.

THE judge had forgot to put on his long-tailed coat. He wore the white hard-boiled shirt, without a collar, and stood flat-footed before Red. An old book of calf-bound poetry was open on the table beside the bottle of whisky.

"Son," he said reproachfully, "there has never been a conviction for rustling in the history of this county, and you have only made Knox and his friends mad!"

"There was only me and Backman, and I was afraid we'd be accused of spite if we strung 'im up—elsewise I would've!"

The judge rattled the pipes on his desk but did not select one. "Knox will be loose on straw bail in twenty minutes!"

"Let 'im!"

"He'll lay for you, Red!"

"Bein' laid for is a part of why you pay me wages."

The judge looked confused. He shook his head.

"I," he said quietly, "am for law and order. Yes. I deprecate the use of violence, but—"

Red scowled. "Deprecate" didn't mean a thing to him but it had a pretty good cuss-word sound.

The judge pursed his lips reflectively. His bright mild eyes stared at Red; then, impulsively, "You ought to have killed Frank Knox! I know that he will try to assassinate you. I don't want you hurt, son."

Red said, "Shucks!" and grinned. "You don't understand about me, Judge. I've stood off and sorta looked at myself ever since I was a fool kid and I find it is this way: I've never yet been much hurt doin' what I orta do, no matter what. But you just let me start something crazy, and I'll sprain a leg, or fall off my horse, or get bunged up. Why, onct I was in town on an old slowpoke of a cow pony when a purty girl come out of a store and looked at me. And me, all of a sudden I wanted to show her what a tophand buster I was, so I reached over and thumbed that bone-rack with some hide on it—and the next thing I knowed, I was settin' in the dust and she was laughin'. Me, that's topped off bad broncs just as fast as the boys could switch saddles! That's how it goes, allus. I figger it's just the same in a gunfight. If it was me that needed killin' and I knowed it—why, Judge, I'd be all trembly and scairt. But I ain't never been so far!"

A smile warmed the judge's round face. "You may not realize it, but that is a pretty sound religious faith. It has sustained martyrs. It has turned many a hopeless battle into a brilliant victory. Well, well! I regret that I haven't any such sustaining faith, but I *am* certain that it must be something of the kind that inspires your—um—oh, have a drink?"

"Sure."

"This old Backman. I have heard of him. He isn't well liked by cowmen."

Red took his drink, wiped his mouth with a backhand swipe.

"He sure is by this cowhand!" he said quietly.

There was a light tap on the door and the judge made a startled grab for his coat. He was huddling into it as the door opened and a blue-eyed, silken-headed girl looked in and asked sweetly, "May I come in?"

Red pulled off his hat, stepped back with stumble of long-shanked spurs, found his hands hanging to his wrists without in the least knowing what to do with them.

Kate Clayton looked at him with large bright eyes. She looked at him so steadily that she did not hear the judge saying how welcome she was, and wouldn't she sit down.

Kate certainly had the princess-girl look, with head up like a thoroughbred and the thin aristocratic face. The look made Red uncomfortable, as if he had

done something he oughn't. Then, all of a sudden, Miss Kate put out her slim gloved hand and smiled. Her voice made Red's ears ring with music:

"So *you* are Red? I think you are the bravest man in the world!"

It was so honest and sweet that Red turned all fidgety in delighted awkwardness. His tanned face reddened, and he stood tongue-tied in pleased bewilderment.

The friendliness of such a proud looking girl dazed him. She had hold of his hand and was keeping hold of it.

"Daddy wants to see and thank you, Red. And I want to! Daddy says that you are as brave as any man he ever saw."

"Aw shucks," Red mumbled helplessly.

The judge rubbed his head with a bandana and wondered at the strangeness of women; for here was the girl that frostily looked down her thin nose at every man, now holding on to an awkward and certainly not handsome boy, and smiling as warmly and tenderly as if she loved him.

"Will you come with me, Red?"

"Sure. You bet."

The judge bowed them out.

They went down the stairs and on the street. Miss Kate held up her long skirt in a gloved hand, kept close at Red's side. People passed and raised their hats and she nodded almost as if she didn't see them.

They paused at the corner across from the hotel while two men rode by splattering dust, and she put a hand on Red's arm.

"Do you know Jim Brady, Red?" she asked.

"I seen him onct. 'Pears a nice feller."

Her face sobered a little and she took a breath like a quick little sigh. "Yes, doesn't he?" She sounded as if she had a little doubt about it; yet Red knew, because he had seen, that she loved Jim Brady.

THE Nelplaid Hotel was a small two-story building with a narrow balcony across the upstairs front. The stairs and hall were uncarpeted, and footsteps had the sound of being in any empty building. Miss Kate's small dainty feet did not make more than the shadow of a sound, but Red's spurs clattered.

Behind her on the stairs, Red looked at her slim little body and he thought that this Jim Brady had better be a pretty fine fellow or he, Red, would ride his neck with rowels.

Kate opened the door and went in ahead.

Old Sam Clayton lay on his side in bed with a hand under his cheek. His other arm was in a sling. His big face had the sagged look of a man who is in pain and doesn't want to talk about it.

Young Bill Clayton and another man were sitting in the room. Kate pushed by them, stooped and kissed Mr. Clayton on the cheek and said with quiet glee, "Here is Red, Daddy!"

Red had bobbed his head at Bill Clayton, who did not look comfortable and had made a bob back at Red without speaking. The other man stood up as Kate came in. He was in store clothes with a bulge at the hip under his coat. A good deal of gray was in his hair, and he had hard eyes, a tight mouth, and a weather-worn face. After Kate had kissed her grandfather, the man said, "I'll come up again this evening, Sam."

Mr. Clayton said huskily, "So long, George."

The man stood still and eyed Red for a moment, then he went to the door. Bill Clayton's look followed him sullenly as if he did not like this leathery-faced old-timer.

Mr. Clayton kept a hand under his cheek. The other arm was in a sling, but he straightened the wrist and waggled the fingers for Red to shake hands. "How are you, boy?"

Red shook hands lightly, then twid-

"You shoot him as you would a rattler!"

dled the brim of his hat. "Oh me, I'm fine, Mr. Clayton. Allus!"

Mr. Clayton was taking short breaths as if tired from running. He stared with a trace of a smile at Red. He saw the rawhide leaness, the litheness that was easy, even graceful, on horseback, but gawkily awkward in a hotel room.

Mr. Clayton moved his head a little on the pillow. After a pause he said huskily, "You look like him, too—like your father when he was a young man."

"You knowed my dad?"

"Before you were born."

Red grinned, pleased. Lots and lots of old-timers had known Red's father. Twenty and more years before when the country was half Indian-owned and only a handful of men were holding the frontier range, men over wide areas had known one another.

Kate put her ungloved fingers on Mr. Clayton's cheeks.

"It is hard for Daddy to talk," she said.

"Mr. Clayton smiled a little and widened his eyes. "I hear you fetched in Frank Knox for rustlin'? Why didn't you kill him?"

"He laid down and wouldn't draw."

Mr. Clayton grunted. "My advice, son, is to find him and kill him before you leave town. Otherwise, he'll lay for you in the hills."

Young Bill stood up. "I'll be goin' along, dad." He went abruptly and did not look back.

Mr. Clayton's eyes followed him with a stare that was sad and wistful. Bill shut the door and Mr. Clayton shut his eyes.

Kate said, "Sit down, Red."

Red twiddled his hat brim and looked at Mr. Clayton. He was a hard old fellow who rode rough-shod, and had made it a fight all of his life. Red thought men like that were great to work for. They would never send a man where they wouldn't go themselves, and they backed a fellow up till hell froze hard.

MR. CLAYTON lay quiet, his hand under his cheek, and looked steadily at Red. The short quick breathing made him seem very sick. He was a long way from out of danger, but he was tough-bodied and meant not to die. A doctor had been brought from Poicoma, the railroad town thirty away, but he had not been able to get the bullets out of Mr. Clayton and was coming back to try again when Mr. Clayton seemed a little stronger.

Nobody said anything for a while. Red poked a crease in his hat crown, then pushed it out and made another. Mr. Clayton stirred, coughed a little.

"Alvord and Knox and some others—Dave Gridger for one!"

"Daddy! You mustn't get excited!"

"They used that Lazy Z valley to run out cows. Mostly mine. Some of my men threw in with them. You ought've killed Knox."

"I reckon."

"And those men you wiped out that day here in town, Red—do you know who they were?"

"Sorta."

Kate's lips trembled strangely, then set hard. There was a quick hurt look in her eyes.

"Some of Kilco's bunch," said Mr. Clayton calmly. "Why they jumped me that away, I don't know."

"I hear tell," said Red, "they was led by a feller named Mell Barber—the one that got away. I hear tell him and Kilco had had a falling out. I don't—"

"Have you heard of a man named Jim Brady?"

Red looked toward Miss Kate. She was staring down at her fingernails, and Red felt unhappy because she looked so hurt about something. He said, "Um, sorta."

"I've found out only since I've been here in bed that Jim Brady is Jim Kilco."

Red said solemnly, "Gosh A'mighty!" His quick look struck Miss Kate's pale face. Now her fingers were tangled together in pained writhing and she stared at them. Red blurted, "Why, Mr. Clayton, if that is so, then it wasn't him that tried to kill you. I sure know that!"

Miss Kate's lips parted on a noiseless gasp and she stared at Red.

His tongue was untied now. He said, earnestly, "I hate outlaws and such, Mr. Clayton, as the devil hates a preacher, but Jim Brady never wanted to hurt you that day. Why, the smoke hadn't quite blowed away before a man come a-runnin' at me from across the street with a rifle in his hand, and he said that I had done right, and he was sorry he hadn't been standin' where he could pitch in and help—on account of the horses and me bein' in the way he didn't dare shoot. If it was Jim Brady, like he said to me he was, he didn't want to hurt you, Mr. Clayton. Why, he could have picked me off from across the street as easy as crackin' a whip!"

Mr. Clayton stared so hard that Red added hastily, "I'm not tryin' to say that Jim Brady is a bit better 'n you think—except I know from how he acted that he was glad them men was killed."

Mr. Clayton moved as if he wanted to sit up but it was too much. His quick breath rattled and he said in a loud voice, "That whole bunch is mixed up in rustlin', Red! The next time you see Jim Brady, you shoot him as you would a rattler!"

Red kept twitching the hat brim in his fingers. He wanted to look up at Miss Kate but couldn't. He stood up. "I'll go now, Mr. Clayton. And I sure hope that you'll be fine."

Miss Kate went with him to the door, and he tried to avoid looking at her, but he had to look when she put out her

"Good-by, Red." Her hurt pale face seemd saying, "Thank you!" even though she didn't know that he knew her secret.

RED went off by himself over near the livery stable and squatted in a strip of shade beside a freight wagon to think. He was not getting on very well with his thoughts when a long-tailed black-and-white dog nosed up.

"Go away," Red said. "I don't like dogs. Git, you!"

The dog wagged its tail and swiped Red's face with a long moist tongue. Red took him by the neck, turned him over in the dust, tickled the lean ribs. "You go get some skirts on if you wanta kiss me. And I got troubles enough without you hornin' in. Go on off and leave me to weep alone."

The dog scrouged around until it got its head on Red's knee, looked up steadily with mouth parted in a triumphant dog-smile. Red scratched behind the dog's ears and tried to go on with his thinking.

Jody came along. He had a stick for a sword and made swipes all about as if cutting off the heads of enemies.

He edged up. "'Lo, Red."

"Howdy, big feller."

Jody sat down in the dust and patted the dog. "You goin' to kep him, Red?"

"I'll tie your ears behind your head if you go suspicionin' me thataway. I don't keep nothin' that ain't mine."

"Aw, he don't b'long to anybody. He followed a wagon in last week and just stayed. He ain't nobody's."

"Then why ain't he yourn?"

"Paw won't let me. But he is a nice dog, ain't he?"

"All dogs is. Four legged ones, I mean. You'll see some two-legged dogs and such things plenty by the time you are as old as me."

Jody put his head down against the dog's. "Why are you settin' here? Waitin' for the stage?"

"Thinkin'."

"'Bout Knox and them?"

"Not much, no. I got worse worries."

"They are up there to the Silver Dollar. Laughin' at you."

"The sheriff, too?"

Jody shook his head. "He ain't there, but Bill Clayton is. Drinkin'. I mean he ain't laughin'. Knox is. He is sayin' you and an old man snuck up on 'im while he was asleep."

Red drew a finger moodily in the dust. "That old man is a real old Injun-fighter, Jody. Sometime, mebbe, I'll interduce you. He hankers for a boy of about your size to set and listen to him." Red fished down in his pocket, pulled out a dollar. "Here. You tell your paw this is to pay for that dog's keep till I come to town again. You tell him me and you are sorta pardners in that dog. Now you trot. I got to do some more thinkin'."

Fifteen minutes later Red's thinking was interrupted by the arrival of the stage. A man or two who belonged to Nelplaid got out and hurried off. A woman got down, too. The driver climbed up and uncorded a trunk and some boxes that he slammed off into the dust, all the while arguing with the livery stable man who was changing horses. Nobody paid attention to the woman, and the violence of the language she heard shocked her.

She came over to where Red squatted. He was the only one in sight who was not grinning at the argument between the driver and the livery man.

"Young man!" she said sharply.

"Yes'um." Red rose, pulling off his hat.

Red thought she was a sour old woman; then he saw that she wasn't very old. She did look sour—or maybe not sour so much as sharp and set. She was stiffly erect; her elbows were stiffly at her side with one gloved hand in the palm of the other before her. Her mouth

was drawn together tightly. She looked Red up and down as if a cowboy was something out of the zoo.

"Young man, can you direct me to a person known as Judge Trowbridge?"

"You bet. I'll take you to where he is."

"And my luggage?"

"You can have the hotel come an' get 'em."

"I thought Western men were chivalrous!" She turned with rebuking stare toward the coach where the argument still went on, profanely.

"Lady, them fellers are no more mad than two pups. They are playin'."

"Playing?"

"Sure. In this country real quarrels are short and quick-spoken. You just call a man a liar, then shoot 'im. Or he shoots you," said Red, as simply as if giving directions.

She eyed him severely and with doubt. "I do not believe you."

"All right, lady. That's how 'tis. I ain't tryin' to pull your leg."

The girl flushed. "If you will be kind enough to direct me to Judge Trowbridge." She gathered up the long heavy skirt, ready to go with him.

THEY walked along in silence, with Red sneaking a look at her face. It was easy, because she kept her eyes straight before her. She wasn't old at all, but her face was hardset. Red bet himself that something would crack if she smiled. She looked sort of underfed.

The judge was dozing in his deep worn chair. The day was hot. He was sweating and had his mouth open. The odor of whisky and tobacco was strong. Red and the woman were in the room before the judge awakened with a confused splutter and dazed look.

The woman said crisply, "Are you Judge Trowbridge?"

"Yes, madam." He reached for his coat.

"I am Miss—" She gave a good deal of stress to the Miss "—Jane C. Alvord, Judge Trowbridge."

The coat dropped from his hand. He looked accusingly at Red as if expecting some joke.

"My, my," he said weakly. "I—I thought you were a man, miss!"

"I deceived you purposely, sir."

"Oh," the judge said vaguely. He got into his coat, brought out a bandana, wiped his head. "Purposely?"

"You would have tried to oppose my coming to take possession of my ranch."

"I? Oh, no. It is your ranch whether you are Miss or Mister."

"But I mean to live there and run it." Miss Alvord looked defiant.

"But you can't do that," said the judge. "A lady alone on a cow ranch!"

"Certainly I can! It is *my* ranch, isn't it? I have always wanted to live in the West." Miss Alvord spoke rapidly, with feeling. "I have been smothered and stifled. Do you know what it is to be a school teacher in Boston?"

The judge regarded her with benign sympathy, bobbed his large head. "I can imagine. But, my dear young lady, you can't imagine what a ranch is like. What it will be like for a person of your refinement!"

"My refinement, as you call it," said Miss Alvord severely, "is the one quality that it will give me the least regret to lose! I have been made miserable during the past few years by trying to be the sort of person fitted to instruct *refined* young ladies."

There was a sound of almost desperate pleading in Miss Alvord's insistence.

The judge sighed. "But you can have no understanding of—of living conditions, Miss Alvord."

"I will get an understanding of them very readily, sir."

Again the judge mopped his head vigorously and looked about as if trying to find something to say to this sharp-fea-

tured girl. "Ah. Well. But here, Miss Alvord, is the manager of your ranch, Mr. Red Clark."

She faced about, eyed Red as if she hadn't seen him before. He was leaning against the wall, rather weakly.

"This boy? Manager of a ranch!"

"No'm," said Red. "I ain't. I quit just now. I took the job till the owner come. You're him—her, I mean. So I quit. Yes'm."

The judge made little flustered movements with a pudgy hand. "That isn't fair, Red. You can't quit. This lady would be helpless without—"

"I was never helpless in my life!" said Miss Alvord, with spirit. "I am going to live at the ranch. If Mr. Clark doesn't like his situation, surely there are other gentlemen who—"

The judge put out both hands, begged, "Miss Alvord, please! Please listen! You don't in the least understand the conditions. Do sit down. Let me explain."

Ten minutes later Red still had a shoulder slumped against the wall and gazed with slant-eyed curiosity at the owner of the Lazy Z. She was looking at Red, astounded. Judge Trowbridge took his third drink of whisky, wiped his lips, and concluded:

"So you see why we can't hope to replace Red, and also why it is impossible for a lady of your quality to live on the ranch. It is dangerous. Positively, physically dangerous!"

Jane Alvord turned toward Red. Her mouth was opened slightly, and with her mouth open she didn't look nearly as hard set. The judge's recital had jarred some of the tightness out of her. Her elbows were not against her side, her back was bent forward a little, and her eyes were bright.

"I—I don't feel sure that I understand," she said in a low voice that was not crisp. "Do you mean that this boy—*killed!*"

"Yes, miss."

"And risked his life also to defend *my* property?"

The judge poured another drink and held it, as if about to propose a toast. "Lady," he began in his best Fourth of July manner, "the knights of old in their glittering armour, with plumes waving, never showed more gallantry, loyalty and courage."

The judge, being well warmed with enthusiasm and whisky, would have gone on; but Red spoke up:

"Shucks. All a cowboy wants is wages."

"And haven't you been receiving suitable wages, Mr. Clark?" she asked.

"Sure."

Jane Alvord arose and went to him; and, just like any other woman when she wanted something, she smiled with a sad-coaxing look, and asked, "Then why are you deserting me, Mr. Clark?"

"You're a woman and don't know anything about cows."

"By that I suppose you mean that you think I am helpless?"

"Sorta."

"And I do not know about 'cows', therefore I am in need of assistance. So because that I do need assistance, you are deserting me?"

Red stiffened and flushed.

"And Judge Trowbridge has just compared your chivalry to that of the old knights."

Red blurted, "I mean you won't let me run the ranch like it orta be!"

"But Mr. Clark, I do want it run as it ought to be. Of course I do!"

"Will you fight rustlers and them?"

"Do you mean persons that steal cattle?"

"Yeah."

"Of course I want to fight them! I do not approve of anything weak and cowardly!" She was earnest and the heightened color in her pale face made her almost good looking.

Red stuck out his hand. "Lady, I'll ride for you!"

(To be continued)

MIRAGE TRAIL

Young Hardesty drove the knife blade down.

By HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

YOUNG Joe Hardesty had been Bedrock's partner for eight years. Young Hardesty was now sixteen. His natural independence had not suffered any. He now thought he knew as much as Bedrock about prospecting and mining, and even more about life in general. Often, when resting from their work in the Mebbyso mine, they enjoyed a friendly argument.

Young Hardesty was bright and quick, Bedrock slow and sound. Nevertheless he had the superstitions natural to the prospector. Young Hardesty admitted a few himself, but when Bedrock declared that anybody who went out of his way to kill a rattler or a coyote invited bad luck, Young Hardesty stared. Why, anyone that wouldn't kill a rattler anywhere, any time, was loco! And anyone that wouldn't plug a coyote when he got the chance had something wrong with his head. Bedrock admitted that it was right and proper to kill a rattler that had strayed too close to camp, or a coyote that robbed a henroost. But to hunt either, deliberately, never brought a fellow any good luck.

Young Hardesty said, "Huh!" which concluded the argument.

When riding his pony Shingles, Young Hardesty always avoided the prairie dog town on the flats south of the mine. A horse might set his foot in a prairie dog hole and break a leg. But on this special occasion Young Hardesty made an exception. He was hunting for a rattler.

Ground owls, prairie dogs and rattlers lived in the same hole, so folks said. Where you found prairie dogs and ground owls you always found snakes. Young Hardesty had thought much about the old man's queer superstition. He wanted to prove to Bedrock that you could kill as many snakes as you liked and have just as much good luck as usual.

Young Hardesty took a long drink from the canteen. He hung it on the saddle horn. It was too hot for rattlers to be about, but Tonto Charley had taught him a way to make rattlers show themselves. You selected a prairie dog hole, sat comfortably astride it and pecked at its edge with your knife. The particles of sand and gravel that rattled down into the hole didn't bother Mr. Ground Owl or Mr. Prairie Dog. But Mr. Snake would grow curious and slide up to see what was happening.

Choosing a big hole, Young Hardesty straddled it, sitting on the sand, his legs wide. With his jack knife he pecked at the edge of the hole. From a mound some thirty feet away a prairie dog scolded.

"Kneel on your heels and look at the sun,

And pray for rain, you son-of-a-gun," chanted Young Hardesty. He waited tensely. No rattler appeared.

Again Young Hardesty pecked at the edge of the hole. Following the faint rustling of sand and pebbles came a long silence. He could hear his heart beat. His back began to feel queer. A rattlesnake could move as slowly as time when a fellow was waiting for somebody, and it could strike as quick as light. Once or twice Young Hardesty had jumped on rattlers and "stomped" them to death. That was the way antelope killed them. The only thing was, you had to be quick. But sitting still, astride a hole, and watching for that broad, tapered head to show up was quite another matter.

Finally, after a long wait, a blunt nose appeared. Young Hardesty held his breath. Was it moving, or was the sun playing tricks? More nose now, slowly broadening to the flat, black head.

"Whoop!" cried Young Hardesty as he drove the knife blade down.

With a tug and a twist he threw the writhing coils as far as he could. Unfortunately the snake fell almost under Shingles' nose. The startled pony reared, stuck his foot in a hole and crashed down.

Young Hardesty ran to him, grabbed the reins and got him up. Trembling, the pony circled, eyeing the snake.

"Stand still, you dum' fool!" cried Young Hardesty. "You've seen plenty of 'em before!" He mashed the rattler's head with a rock, cut off the rattles and put them in his pocket. If old Bedrock began another of his talks on killing snakes or coyotes, Young Hardesty would shake the rattles at his partner and tell him to bring on his bad luck.

Shingles had fallen on the canteen. But it wasn't busted, just dented a little. You couldn't call that bad luck. It might happen anytime, anywhere. Brushing against a rock, or tree, for instance.

"Tonto Charley," observed Young Hardesty, "used to stick 'em, yank 'em out, put his heel on 'em and cut off their heads, just like pickin' berries. Me, I got to do some practisin'."

It was characteristic of Young Hardesty that he said nothing to Bedrock about his recent escapade. Anyhow, a fellow had to wait a few days to see how his luck would run. Bad luck didn't

always hop onto you the minute you did something that was supposed to fetch it.

THERE had been little rain that season. Even the Arizona desert, accustomed to scant moisture, began to show it. Greasewood and cactus looked more than ordinarily dry and brittle. The rocks and granite ledges seemed to be blistering and scaling off. If you were not in the shade, you didn't stand still long in one place, unless your boot soles were pretty thick. Small desert birds hid under bushes, their tiny mouths open, gasping for air. They didn't move even when you went right up to them. From the foothills of the Mebbyso to the range across the valley hung a thin, smoke-like haze.

"Dry steam," Bedrock called it, "and a sight hotter than clear air."

Despite the unusual heat, Young Hardesty had decided to go to Bowdry, some thirty miles north. Bedrock admitted that they were running a mite short of tobacco, but they could get along till the weather grew cooler. Young Hardesty thought Bedrock was getting mighty fussy about a little heat. There was shade at the water hole, fifteen miles north. Another fifteen would see a fellow into Bowdry.

Moreover, Young Hardesty had a special objective. A month ago he had sent for a saddle catalogue. It must be at the post office by this time. He knew it wasn't a reason to make the journey, but it was an excuse. To get mail of any kind was interesting. To get a saddle catalogue with pictures and prices was a big thing. Besides, he hadn't been to town for a month.

Shortly after daybreak, with canteen filled, some provisions, he set out. Even then it was blistering hot. But a fellow could stand it as long as the sun wasn't too straight up.

A week had passed since he had killed the rattler. No misfortune had occurred. In fact good luck seemed to be hanging round. Almost by accident Bedrock had opened up a pocket of fairly rich ore. It wasn't a fortune, but it meant they wouldn't have to work so hard for the next month or two. Because of the find Young Hardesty felt free to take a little time off. Not that traveling the desert in August was fun, but going somewhere was a darned sight better than pushing a wheelbarrow.

The pony, Shingles, didn't like the idea of quitting a shady meadow. He showed it in his deliberate gait. Young Hardesty wisely let him take his time. With his hat brim low to shade his eyes from the up-glare of broken rock and sand, Young Hardesty thought of the catalogue awaiting him in Bowdry.

Dust caked on Shingles. Head waves swam across the desert floor. The distant hills were dulled by a blue haze. Accustomed as he was to the desert, Young Hardesty's lips grew stiff, his throat dry and tense. He shrugged as the sun bit through his cotton shirt. It was a mite hotter than he had bargained for. But shucks! he had a good horse between his knees, plenty of water and grub.

An hour out from the mine he began to lose some of his interest in Bowdry and saddle catalogues. Traveling in that heat had become real work, so he set himself to thinking about all sorts of things to keep from thinking of the heat. Meanwhile his keen dark eyes were busy noting distant landmarks. If a fellow kept looking at the trail ahead it would tire him all the sooner.

Along Young Hardesty's course, to the left, ran the mountain range. The trail skirted the foothills. To the right spread a flat expanse of all but brushless sand, a vast desert floor which melted into the dim, eastern skyline. Midway in this broad, empty reach, a phantom lake spread north and south, blue, cool and inviting. Mirrored upside down

in the lake were the peaks of the Pinnacles.

Nothing unusual about that. A mirage was nothing to look at twice. But this mirage was unusual. Young Hardesty had never seen a team and wagon standing in the middle of a mirage, its wheels hub deep in the blue water. Nor had he ever seen anywhere, a wagon with a white flag fluttering above it.

He gazed at the distant picture, rubbed his eyes and gazed again. There it was, a wagon stranded in the middle of the lake, and a white flag above it. There was something queer about that flag. There wasn't a breath of air stirring, yet the flag stood out flat against the eastern sky.

YOUNG HARDESTY reasoned that he had now made about twelve miles. The water hole was only three miles north. The trail was a little up grade. It would take about an hour to make the three miles. Gazing at the strange wagon, Young Hardesty finally decided that it was a freak of the mirage—the wagon might be fifteen or twenty miles distant, and not in the middle of the mirage at all. He touched Shingles with his heel. The pony plodded on, head low, walking at a measured gait.

Young Hardesty again drew up and sat gazing at the mirage. The wagon was there, but the horses seemed to have disappeared. As he stopped, the accumulated heat rose and smote him. He drank sparingly from the canteen, hung it on the horn carefully.

"We'll keep movin'," he said as his wet lips dried almost instantly. But to Shingles' disgust, Young Hardesty reined him toward the empty desert, swimming in heat. He had decided to take one look at the strange wagon. If, as he traveled toward it, it kept moving away from him—he knew that the edge of the mirage itself would do this—he would turn back to the regular trail.

Slowly the edge of the lake rolled away, melted to sand and scattered rock. A half hour of plodding over the glittering desert floor—and the wagon was still there. Young Hardesty had seen cattle knee deep in a similar mirage lake which moved away as he approached. But the cattle had remained. It began to look as if this mirage had simply surrounded the wagon, not thrown its likeness from a distance.

Another half hour and he was riding across the barren flats which ran up to the foot of the distant Pinnacles. A few hundred yards ahead of him stood the wagon, its white flag against the sky. "I wonder what in hell that outfit is doin' out here, instead of on the regular trail?" he muttered.

Arriving at the wagon, he saw that both horses were down. One of them raised its gaunt head as Young Hardesty hailed. From beneath the gray canvas cover a man crawled out—an old man with a white beard. The dark tan of his face had faded to a queer yellow. His eyes were bright, staring, his lips swollen.

"Water!" he mumbled. Young Hardesty handed the canteen to him. Shaking like a branch in the wind, the old man moved round to the back of the wagon. "Here's some water, mother," he croaked.

Young Hardesty bit his lip. There was a woman in the outfit—probably an old woman. And these pilgrims had run out of water!

Landlookers, homesteaders, judging by the rig. Maybe from The Indian Territory, or Kansas. They had tied an old white shirt to a tent pole. The shirt was held out flat by a rope tied to it and pegged to the ground. The horses wouldn't get up again. Hell of a note! Young Hardesty walked round to the back of the wagon. The old man was now gulping noisily from the canteen, his Adam's apple working up and down. In the body of the wagon lay a

woman in a gingham dress—a little old woman, thinned, tanned, her hands brown spotted, crippled by hard work. She nodded as Young Hardesty appeared.

"John is feeling it more than me," she said in a weak voice. "He gave me the last of our water yesterday—wouldn't touch a drop himself. And him out in that sun trying to keep the team moving." In spite of her weakness she smiled at the visitor.

"How did you get stuck?"

The little old woman nodded toward the distant Pinnacles. "A man back in Tempe said to keep heading for the Pinnacles—that there was water there, and we could make it easy."

The old man was sitting on the ground, the canteen in his hand.

"She's empty," he mumbled.

It was a gallon canteen. Young Hardesty had taken but a sip or two himself. He was sure the old folks had not drunk the rest of the water.

"I noticed it felt kind of light when John give it to me," said the little old woman.

"Lemme see it," said Young Hardesty sharply.

He examined the canteen, saw a tiny tear in the worn canvas cover. The tear was on the seam at the lower edge of the canteen. The seam had been sprung ever so lightly, but enough to allow a seep—a drop at a time, unnoticed because of the swift evaporation.

"Got a canteen of your own?" said Young Hardesty.

The old man looked up, shook his head. "Just a jug, and the keg. Both empty."

"Give me the jug. I'll fetch you some more water."

"You going to quit us?" said the old man.

"Now, father!" said the little old woman reprovingly. "He ain't himself," she explained. "Ever since we run out of water he's acted kind of queer. And no wonder. Is it far to those Pinnacles?"

"Too far for you folks. I'm goin' over to another water hole. It'll take me a couple of hours to get there and back. Got any potatoes in your outfit?"

"We got a few," said the little old woman.

"Pare 'em and chew 'em. They'll help.

HAPPENING to glance back, Young Hardesty saw that the old man was following him. Young Hardesty told him he had better stay with the wagon. But the landlooker paid no heed. He came on with a straight-ahead, determined stride that didn't fool Young Hardesty at all. The old fellow was loco, actually didn't know what he was doing.

"I'm going with you," he declared. "Give me a little water first—"

"Canteen's empty. You had the last. Go on back to your woman. I'll fetch you some water."

"Got to keep moving," said the old man stubbornly. "Got to hook up the team and keep moving."

"Your team's down. So will you be if you don't go back."

"Pinnacles. He said there was water at the Pinnacles." The old man made a grab for the empty canteen.

"I ought to knock you on the head and pack you back," muttered Young Hardesty. He rode on. For a few seconds the old man watched him, then began to follow again.

Young Hardesty put Shingles to a lope. The old man began to run. Young Hardesty reined up. "He'll cash in, sure as hell. But mebby I can get back to the woman in time."

The old man made straight for the horse, again tried to grab the canteen. Young Hardesty fought him off. It was bad enough to have these pilgrims on his hands, but to have to battle with a crazy man was piling it on pretty thick.

Young Hardesty rode on. Behind him

came the patter and shuffle of broad-soled shoes. How the land seeker could keep going puzzled Young Hardesty, till he remembered that sometimes a desert traveler, mad with thirst, often showed amazing energy—the flare-up of his strength just before it left him altogether.

Any minute the old man might buckle up, or start to tear his clothes off and run in circles. Then would come the finish.

"Your wife's alone back there," said Young Hardesty. But, paying no attention, the old man kept muttering that they would have to keep going.

Finally Young Hardesty gave up trying to persuade him. He was feeling pretty thirsty himself. The fact that the canteen was empty didn't help any. Now if the canteen hadn't leaked, these folks might have had enough water to pull them through. But maybe the landlooker would make it to the water hole. He looked as if he might have been a pretty stout man in his day. If he didn't start in to drink the water hole dry he might get over his loco spell and come out all right. But Young Hardesty worried most about the woman. She was frail, not the kind that would make a fuss before she went out. When she went she would just quietly go to sleep.

That ride to the waterhole was the hardest experience Young Hardesty had so far suffered. Once he was tempted to let the old man take the pony. But you couldn't tell what a crazy man might do. If they were both set afoot out there on the flats, no telling what might happen.

Again Young Hardesty glanced back. In the distance stood the wagon, a toy wagon now with its tiny white flag. Round about it the mirage was again creeping—a phantom lake. Directly behind Young Hardesty trudged the old man, staring straight ahead. What did his fever-wild eyes see? Water, grass, tall trees and shade? Or nothing but endless desert, over which he must trudge forever, tortured by thirst?

Shingles was going slower now. He was beginning to feel the pull of the foothill grade. Pretty soon they would be at the water hole.

Usually the pony pricked up its ears when nearing the familiar spot. It meant plenty to drink, sometimes a camp and rest. But with head low Shingles plodded on up to the white-rimmed sink. Young Hardesty sat staring, his mouth open. The water hole, its surface brownish red with cracked and blistered mud, was dry. And back there, under that faded gray canvas wagon top, lay a little old woman waiting for promised help. Young Hardesty clenched his teeth. This was about the limit.

For a few seconds the landlooker stood gazing at the dry desert sink, talking to himself. Presently he started to walk out toward the darker mud in its middle. The edge of the checkered scurf crackled and broke beneath his feet. He began to dig like a dog in a burrow. Suddenly his strength gave out. He crawled back to the rim of the sink, gazed up at Young Hardesty with haggard eyes.

"You fetched us to the wrong place. Tell my woman—." With a deep sigh he collapsed, lay as if asleep. Young Hardesty dismounted and stood looking down at him. What message had the old man tried to leave for his woman? And what message would Young Hardesty have for her, now?

ALREADY he had made up his mind what he would do. No use riding to Bowdry—fifteen miles more. Even if he got someone to start back with him immediately, they would hardly arrive at the wagon in time to do anything for the woman. But he might possibly make it over to the Pinnacles. The spring there was on the north side of a rock cliff, sheltered from the sun. It had never been known to go dry, even in the

hottest weather. He cut a saddle string, looped it through the handle of the jug and slung it on the horn. The sun had dropped over the western hills when, with a last glance at the body stretched beside the waterhole, Young Hardesty set out.

The mirage was gone. In the fading light he lost sight of the speck that marked the position of the wagon. But he had it located in his mind, knew how to get back to it. Stubbornly Shingles plodded through the evening heat. Stubbornly Young Hardesty fought down his thirst. As for food, he had no appetite.

The tragedy had hit him so hard he began to feel queer himself. He caught himself saying, "We got to keep going." The old man had kept saying that. A fellow was a fool to talk to himself, either a fool or loco. And Young Hardesty knew he wasn't loco, even if the familiar country did look strange, and an absurd feeling of being lost oppressed him.

Slowly the rim of the moon appeared, clear and cool. Moon shadows spread across the desert, blurring rock and ridge to twice their natural size. Shingles, pretty well worn out, shuffled along, his shadow seeming to slide across the sand as if floating on water. Young Hardesty felt as if he, too, were floating along in a kind of dream. It would be so easy to quit, right there, stretch out on the sand and sleep. He cursed himself for even having thought of it. He could see the little old woman, her calm, wrinkled face, her work-crippled hands folded, waiting for him to return.

The thin, wavering call of a far away coyote fetched Shingles' ears up.

"It ain't us," said Young Hardesty, grimly. The coyotes would gather at the dry water hole, snap and snarl at one another over the body. And Bedrock had said it was bad luck to go out of your way to kill a coyote!

From here to there is just as far as from there to here, unless one way is upgrade. Bedrock used to say that. Sounded strange. But the old man was right. In the desert it wasn't so much a case of miles as of the kind of country you traveled. Time was the measure. Nearing the Pinnacles a fellow couldn't make time. Too many sharp upthrusts of rock and tufa. A horse had to watch his feet.

The moon, full and clear, had risen about six feet above the rim of the world. Six feet, from where Young Hardesty saw it. How many million miles in actual distance? And it had taken the moon but a few minutes. Young Hardesty shrugged. Time was something you couldn't get away from. You couldn't hold time back, even if there was a little old woman waiting. . .

"Get a move on!" said Young Hardesty, digging his heels into Shingles' ribs.

IN THE shadow of the huge cliff from which rose the Pinnacles, Young Hardesty dismounted and led the pony toward the spring. Within a few yards of it Shingles stopped. The pony was thirsty, yet refused to go on. Something was wrong.

In the starlight it was impossible to define more than the triangular edge of the spring, its base against the dark cliff. The spring couldn't have gone dry. Even if it had, Shingles would walk up to it and sniff. Young Hardesty stood still. Presently he picked up a chunk of tufa and hurled it toward the spring. A sibilant buzz answered him. He picked up another heavy chunk of tufa and strode toward the sound.

He mashed the snake to a pulp, went back and led Shingles to water. About five minutes later Young Hardesty rode down along the cliff, rounded its western end and struck south.

Toward midnight he found the wagon, a phantom in a phantom land. He could not see into it clearly.

"Here we are," he said, trying to make his voice sound cheery. "How are you making it?"

No answer came. He climbed in. The little old woman still lay with her hands folded. But her jaw had dropped. Without being conscious of it Young Hardesty took off his hat.

Coyotes came as close as they dared, howled to the moon, and yelped their disappointment. But Young Hardesty did not hear them. He slept far beyond the time he had planned. The morning sun in his face awakened him.

There was nothing to do now but ride to Bowdry and report. He fed Shingles, got his own breakfast, and then took a handful of coarse sand and poured it into his canteen. The sand would settle to the bottom. Some of the particles would seep through with the water. But others would lodge in the tiny crack, cut down the seep to almost nothing. He poured half the water from the jug into the canteen. The rest he poured into a bucket and gave to the pony. He covered the body of the woman with a bed quilt.

From the wagon he cut diagonally across the desert, midway between the Pinnacles and the dry water hole. He had been riding about an hour when thunderheads began to gather. Within the next hour a heavy rain fell, cooling the tense air, spreading to pools in the sandy hollows. If it had rained yesterday or the day before—Hell of a note the way things happened sometimes.

The ride to Bowdry was comparatively easy. Refreshed by the change in weather, Shingles walked briskly. At three that afternoon Young Hardesty was in the sheriff's office, reporting the death from thirst of two pilgrims out on the flats south of the Pinnacles. He had forgotten the saddle catalogue, even the tobacco, until the postmaster told him there was some mail for him. Young Hardesty spent the rest of the afternoon and evening lugubriously loafing about town. In the morning he would ride out to the dry water hole with the sheriff and his deputy, and show him where the wagon was.

FOR several days after he arrived at the Mebbyso, Young Hardesty went about his work silently. Bedrock asked no questions. Finally, one evening, Young Hardesty told him about the tragedy, told of the tiny seep in the canteen. The accident had happened just after he had speared the rattler. If he hadn't killed the snake, would the accident have happened?

Old Bedrock shook his head. "No telling, son. But don't you lay it up against yourself. Chances are those folks would have got stuck somewhere, anyhow. Folks that ain't used to traveling the desert better stay away."

"That fella in Tempe that told 'em to head for the Pinnacles—" Young Hardesty's eyes grew hard.

"That was their bad luck. Not your killing the snake."

Young Hardesty was not convinced. In spite of the man in Tempe, he felt that in a large measure he was responsible for the death of the landseekers. He grieved especially about the little old woman, so quiet, so uncomplaining. She had trusted him to come back and help them. He had failed. Did she know at the time that her man had left her —gone on his crazy quest for water? Young Hardesty hoped that she hadn't known that.

Bitter toward circumstance, or luck, or whatever a fellow might call it, he rose and started down the mine trail toward the desert.

"Where are you going, son?" said Bedrock gently.

His eyes dry and hot, his mouth grim, Young Hardesty swung round. "I'm goin' down yonder and kill me another of them dam' rattlers, just to see what happens."

"You halfwits! I'm Lieutenant de Campbell!"

THE BED ROLL of MAJOR GILHOOLEY

By WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN

A COLONEL in division headquarters took his feet down off the desk and suggested a maneuver. Colonels in headquarters are addicted to such practices.

"It would be a fine thing," he said, "if we would send the lads out to fight against each other for ten days. We would call the northern regiments the Purples and the southern regiments the Greens and a great deal of good would come of it all."

This colonel was a Mick with red hair and the smell of battle was in his nostrils. Across the desk his assistant stirred himself a little uneasily and looked out of the window at the rain. It had been raining for three weeks now.

"Bad weather," the assistant ventured. "Wouldn't it be better to put it off until the dry season, sir?"

"Rot," Colonel McGuire told him severely. "A soldier does not wait for good weather in which to fight." The severe expression left his face as he contemplated the details of his plan. "General Hokes will command the Greens and I, myself, will be his chief-of-staff. The Purples will come up so," and he reached out a finger and traced a line on the map. "I will put a battalion here!" Another line. "When the Purples attack we will confuse them considerably and will win a great victory—one which even an umpire will concede. Major Gilhooley is the man to command that battalion!"

"Ah," the assistant said, being well versed in army procedure and etiquette. "Ah, yes indeed."

"Gilhooley is the man for the job," the colonel went on dreamily, rubbing his spurs across the desk and blowing

smoke at the ceiling. "We'll put him in position two days ahead, then send him sealed orders at the last moment and the battle will be won. Who knows—there might even be a star in it for me."

"Certainly, certainly," the assistant said.

And so the thing was perpetrated. The colonel went in to see the old man and laid the thing before him. The old man ran his fingers through his white hair and scowled.

"A pretty idea," he said, "but will it work?"

Colonel McGuire was positive about the thing. "Like a watch, General. It can't go wrong."

"This Gilhooley—who is he? Never heard of him before."

"A strong man, General. He'll hold the pass as they come up. Then, two nights later, we'll send him special orders and he'll move across the hills and get on their flank and shove them into the sea. I can recommend Gilhooley highly. He is a strong and sudden man."

"It would be a great lesson to the seaward regiments," the general said. "They have been getting uppity of late. However, it is no easy thing to dispatch secret orders in the field with enemy patrols about. Perhaps you have an idea on the subject?"

"I have," the Mick colonel told him. "Major Gilhooley will forget his bed roll and will send a truck back for it. The orders and the maps showing the hostile dispositions will be in the bed roll. Who would bother two soldiers carrying a major's bed roll?"

"I am doubtful," the old man told him, "but I will try it, the seaward regiments being prideful beyond all enduring. You may get out the orders, Colonel McGuire."

And so the thing was done and would have been a great success if the word had not carried through devious channels to the ears of the general commanding the seaward regiments. This general was a man of resource and he sat on his verandah that night and sipped a whiskey and soda and spoke with his aide, Lieutenant de Campbell.

"Cross me up, will he?" the general commanding the seaward defenses said bitterly. "The old billy goat! He will not! You, personally, will get that bed roll, de Campbell. You understand?"

The aide grinned happily, being a resourceful young man.

RAIN made a silvery curtain through which the single headlamp of the battered G.M.C. bored an unwinking eye. Water splashed on the hot hood and slopped into the open cab to further drench the two men who already dripped like a pair of drowned cats.

The concrete curved in a sleek and shining ribbon; then the red mud of a cane field road showed for a moment in the head light as Luke-the-Dorgan wrenched the wheel around. Red soup engulfed Pinky Kew, the assistant driver, as he grabbed wildly to keep from being tossed out into the streaming night.

"Hey," he shouted above the roar of the truck, "yuh don't have to take no turns like that. Th' major said yuh was to drive careful!"

"Shut up!" Luke-the-Dorgan told him savagely. "I got enough trouble tonight without listenin' to any drivel from you! If you don't like it you can get off an' walk!"

Pinky Kew hunched the sleeve of his raincoat down over a hand and used the slack of it to wipe the mud out of his placid and moon-shaped face. The truck swung into a line of ruts, leaped across a cane railroad and charged at a hill which loomed darkly ahead. The battalion command post lay up that way—a battalion command post where Major Mike Gilhooley waited for his bedding roll. The thought made Luke-the-Dorgan a little ill.

Pinky cleared his throat apologetically and glanced out of the corners of his eyes at the hunched shape of Luke-the-Dorgan.

"Hey, Luke," he said tentatively.

Luke-the-Dorgan tramped on the foot throttle and the ancient G.M.C. shuddered as it took a slick turn on two wheels and went on up the hill. Green cane was a wall on either side of the spear of the headlight.

"Hey, Luke." Pinky had to yell to even hear himself above the banging which went on beneath the loose hood. "You ain't mad about what happened back there at Pearl City, are yuh?"

Luke-the-Dorgan spat out into the streaming rain and lifted a hand from the wheel to gesture viciously.

"Mad?" he shouted in a bitter voice. "No, *I* ain't mad—only, when the major finishes, I'm goin' to take what's left of you an' tramp you down so deep into th' mud that you won't see daylight again for a year! Oh no, *I* ain't mad, Pinky! Just surprised an' hurt."

"By golly, you sound like you was mad," Pinky said in a plaintive voice.

Luke-the-Dorgan made vague and choking sounds and bent lower over his wheel. A new anxiety was beginning to bother him. The road looked vaguely unfamiliar and they should have passed the pineapple cannery by now.

Pinky Kew was explaining: "How was *I* tuh know that them guys was Purples? They talked nice—polite fellers, all of 'em. Besides, there hadn't ought to be any Purples at Pearl City. Corporal Silenski told me all th' Purples is down in Ewa."

"Ah, nuts. I could kill yuh!"

Luke-the-Dorgan lifted a hand to gesture again, slapped it back onto the wheel just in time to swing the G.M.C. out of a ditch which rushed out of the night toward them. The truck was beginning to labor warningly on the grade and steam made a thin plume above the radiator cap.

Pinky went on defensively: "I was just sittin' there in the truck like you told me when these fellers come up. They was wearin' G.I.'s like any other Dogface an' *I* didn't see nothing wrong with 'em. One says:

" 'Hello, soldier. A nasty night tuh be out in, ain't it?'

" 'I ain't seen it rain so hard since I left th' old man's farm down in Laclede Country, Missoury,' I tells him.

" 'Where yuh goin', soldier?' says he.

" 'I an' Luke are goin' up in the hills to where th' first battalion C.P. is,' says I. 'We got th' major's bed roll back there in th' truck. He has been sleepin' kinda cold for th' last two nights without it."

" 'You don't say!' This feller is polite an' interested. I like to talk with a feller like that. 'This major wouldn't be called Gilhooley, now?'

"I tell him: 'That's th' name, friend. I an' Luke are th' major's right hand men. He couldn't do anything without I an' Luke.'

" 'I bet he couldn't.'

"Nice fellers, see? Well, there's some more talk an' then this feller says: 'I sure got to hand it to you brave lads what goes out an' fights wars in nasty weather like this. I'd like tuh do something for you. I tell you what—I got a quart here. Suppose we slip over into th' shadows an' I will give you a nip of same. It will warm yuh for the ride.'

"Yuh know, I don't think that it would have been polite to have turned him down, Luke, after he was so nice an' all."

LUKE-THE-DORGAN said bitterly: "I could cut your throat, you big thimble-wit. I leave you alone for a minute while I go in to pay for a quart of oil and what happens? You let a Purple patrol come along and steal th' major's bed roll. Maybe you remember what th' major said before we left?"

"I guess I wasn't listenin'," Pinky mumbled. "I figured you'd get all th' dope. Anyway, I'm nothin' but the assistant driver. I'm just supposed tuh help you when yuh get in trouble."

"Help!" Luke-the-Dorgan said savagely. "You're about as helpful as a busted wheel! Well, I'll tell you what th' major said:

" 'Come back without that bed roll and I personally will pull a leg off you an' beat you to death with it. After that I will put you in th' guardhouse for such a period that you will still be there when th' graves open up on th' Judgment Day!'

"That's what he said, donkey! Maybe you don't believe him?"

Pinky wiped at his face again and his moon-shaped visage was a little worried.

He said: "It don't look so good, does it? Maybe we hadn't ought to go back at all, Luke."

The road flattened out and a big plateau stretched vaguely in front of them as the engine coughed alarmingly. They crossed a bridge over a cane field ditch and Luke-the-Dorgan trod on the brake. Steam was a flimsy pillar against the beam of the head light.

"We're out of water. Get out an' fill 'er up," Luke said sourly. "Besides that we're on th' wrong road. I've got my troubles tonight."

There was a faint gurgling sound beside him and he turned swiftly to catch the vague outline of a bottle tipped above his assistant's mouth. He reached out, yanked it away. It was heavy in his hand, tokening a comfortable fullness.

He said: "What the—" but his tone was milder.

"I was thinkin' about the major." Pinky explained. "It give me a chill, kind of."

"Where'd you get it?"

"That feller back at Pearl City. He said I'd been so nice, answerin' his questions an' all, he wanted me tuh take it. He said everybody ought tuh help soldiers that has tuh fight wars in nasty weather like this."

"Get out an' fill that radiator," Luke-the-Dorgan told him.

Pinky climbed down laboriously and fished the canvas bucket from the back of the G. M. C., went on toward the ditch with his shape vague in the rain. For a minute Luke-the-Dorgan watched; then the bitterness of the night's events dropped upon him.

"I might just as well be tried for this, along with all the other things I'm goin' to be tried for," he soliloquized bitterly. "Here goes, Luke. I'll see yuh in the guardhouse."

HE drank and then drank again and presently he felt better. Pinky Kew was slopping water across the radiator from the canvas bucket. Luke-the-Dorgan drank again and, as he looked, Pinky seemed to lose some of the fiendishness which had marked him a few minutes ago. Not a bad guy, Luke thought. After all, what was one bed roll, more or less, between friends. Maybe he had been too hard on Pinky.

Pinky Kew screwed the radiator cap tight and slopped back through the mud to toss the canvas bucket into the back of the truck as he climbed aboard. The rain was coming down harder.

Pinky said, with an unaccustomed melancholy in his voice: "You know, I been thinkin', Luke. Maybe th' major *is* goin' tuh be mad about that bed roll. He's hell on wheels sometimes when he gets mad."

A certain peace had descended upon Luke-the-Dorgan. He rested his forearms on the wheel and scowled thoughtfully into the rain. Then he unfolded his arms and took another small nip.

"Anybody might of done it," he said graciously. "Why even I might have done it. Don't let it bother you no more."

"There's th' major, though," Pinky said doubtfully. "Maybe he ain't goin to feel th' same way about it, Luke."

"Hah!" Luke told him. "Hah!" He tipped the bottle again and was suddenly aware of a feeling of peace and good-fellowship toward the world. He passed the bottle. "Have a drink, Pinky."

"Don't mind if I do," Pinky mumbled. "I been thinkin' about the major some more an' that chill has got worse."

"Listen," Luke-the-Dorgan said in an impressive voice. "What is it that th' major wants, Pinky?"

"Ask me something hard. He wants his bed roll."

"Sure. He wants his bed roll."

"Exactly," Luke-the-Dorgan told him, "An' that's what we're goin' to get for him, Pinky. That's what we're goin' to get for him!"

"Th' Purples has got it. You told me so yourself."

"Purples!" Luke-the-Dorgan said. "Pouf! Who are th' Purples? A bunch of seacoast dog-faces without imagination. Now you an' me, we got imagination, Pinky!"

"I wish tuh Peter you'd imagine that bed roll back then."

Pinky Kew lifted the bottle and stared reflectively at it against the yellow beam of the headlight. The level was lower, he saw. Morosely he tipped it to his lips again. Luke-the-Dorgan took it away from him, after a minute.

"Easy on th' Class I supplies," he cautioned. "You an' me have got things to do on that bottle."

"What things?" Pinky Kew asked sadly.

"What things?" There was a faint indignation in Luke-the-Dorgan's voice. "We got to get th' major's bed roll! Any other questions, stupid?"

"Yeah. How we goin' tuh do it?"

"Listen," Luke said darkly, "those birds stole that bed roll from us, didn't they?"

"Yeah, they sure stole it all right."

"Well, even in war games yuh can't go around stealin' other people's bed rolls. We're goin' down into Ewa, where th' Purples are camped, an' we're going tuh steal it back. Get out an' crank 'er tail up, Pinky."

Pinky Kew mumbled a little and shook his head. Then he reached for the bottle again and, after a minute, clambered out into the rain. The G. M. C. roared with a sudden fury of sound which bit into the murk of the night.

"I see trouble ahead," Pinky yelled in a resigned voice as he sat down beside Luke-the-Dorgan, his clothes dripping. "Don't mind me, though."

"Hang tight, ape. We're goin' to take off!"

Luke-the-Dorgan wheeled the truck around until the single headlight pointed into the tunnel through the cane along which they had just come. Mud spattered out from behind as the chains took hold, and then they were careening down the slope with the darkness streaming past them and the rain slapping into their faces. They hit the bridge and Pinky left his seat to smack solidly against the wooden top of the cab.

"Hey!"

The wind ripped the words away from his mouth. Luke-the-Dorgan was hunched across his wheel with his go-to-hell hat on the back of his head and his lips grinning in the faint light which filtered back across the hood.

He yelled: "You ever hear of a feller called General Sheridan, kid?"

"Naw! You know I ain't acquainted with none of them brass hats."

"Well, you will be before th' night's over!"

They steamed on into the rain.

THERE was a Cossack post at the big bridge over the Waiamae road and Lieutenant de Campbell, back from Purple headquarters in Ewa, waited

there for the regiment which presently would come slogging along in the rain and the darkness. Forewarned by the maps and orders purloined from Major Gilhooley's bed roll, the Purples were sending the Ninety-second in to make a mess of the plans which Colonel McGuire had laid so carefully. Lieutenant de Campbell waited to guide the infantry into position.

Corporal Dan Grogarty had built a tiny fire beneath the bridge, where the light was safe from prying eyes, and de Campbell squatted over it while he talked with Corporal Dan.

The officer wore spattered denims and there was little about him now to remind one of the gilded aide who was wont to follow the general commanding the seaward regiments, in his goings up and down.

Corporal Dan Grogarty said: "Lootenant, I would give a pretty tuh see Major Gilhooley's face when them two Johns show up without th' bed roll. I would admire even better tuh listen tuh the language which th' major is goin' tuh bandy about."

Lieutenant de Campbell permitted himself a discreet chuckle. All in all, he reflected, it had been a rather neat bit of business, brilliantly planned and faultlessly executed. The general had said as much. In another two hours, now, the Ninety-second would be in position and when dawn came the Greens would find themselves outflanked and out-maneuvered and ruled beaten by a bevy of flint-hearted umpires. Lieutenant de Campbell chuckled again.

"The poor soldiers that have to fight wars in weather like this," he said reminiscently.

Corporal Dan Grogarty cocked an inquiring eye as laughter shook the lieutenant's shoulders. He would have spoken but Private first class Wilcox was yelling up there on the embankment.

"Corporal! Hey, Grogarty!"

Corporal Dan Grogarty regretfully left the fire and the shelter of the bridge to flounder up through the mud. Private Wilcox was standing with his rifle under his raincoat and the water dripping from the end of his nose while he pointed up the road.

"Listen to that," he said. "It sounds like a regiment of tanks is comin' down the road from Pearl City."

A mile away the road curved around a long shoulder and, as Corporal Dan Grogarty looked, a dim finger of light came into view and careened down on the bridge. A shrill clattering and banging distressed the peace of the night.

Feet splashed in the mud and Lieutenant de Campbell joined the two men. The light was coming on swiftly, moving in a series of dizzy jerks and turns Lieutenant de Campbell's voice was crisp and business-like.

"That's an army truck! Stop it, Corporal! I'll have that soldier's hide for driving like that! Spread out across the bridge and stop him!"

"Yer sir."

Corporal Dan Grogarty moved out with Private first class Wilcox in his wake. The approaching truck rounded a curve a hundred yards away and came bounding on. Corporal Grogarty yelled and waved his arms; Private Wilcox did the same. Then the yellow finger of the light bore full on Corporal Grogarty and he swore and dived into the mud like a frightened rabbit. A dozen yards farther on the G. M. C. skidded to a stop with tires screeching.

"Hey," Luke-the-Dorgan said, poking his head out into the rain. "What's th' hell goes on here? Don't you know no better than tuh stand out in th' middle of th' road when a car's comin'?"

Lieutenant de Campbell stomped angrily through the beam of the head light and came upon Pinky Kew's side of the cab. Pinky gasped suddenly as the light fell across the officer's face.

"What do you mean by driving a

government truck like that?" Lieutenant de Campbell was beginning. "You're under arrest! I'll have you in the guard-house—"

"Luke!" Pinky Kew interrupted him hoarsely. "This is th' bird that swiped th' major's bed roll! He's th' one that done th' talkin'!"

Something warned Luke-the-Dorgan that all was not exactly right here, but it was no time for halfway measures.

"Grab him, Pinky!" he shouted and stomped on the accelerator.

They went down the road with the truck careening like a ship in a heavy sea and with Pinky Kew half out of the cab and with his hands full of Lieutenant de Campbell. Behind, on the bridge, Corporal Dan Grogarty picked himself up out of the mud and gazed after the disappearing tail light.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said. "I *will* be damned!"

THEY had gone a half a mile down the road before Luke-the-Dorgan finally slowed the G. M. C. Pinky Kew howled suddenly and there was a splash at the side of the road.

"He bit me!" Pinky said bitterly. "Wait till I get my hands on that such-an'-such!"

Luke climbed from behind the wheel and walked out into the rain. A figure, hung with gobs of mud, charged through the headlight and smashed him amidships; he went down and a rough hand pushed his face into the muck at the side of the road. Above him a voice was making choked and incoherent sounds. Luke-the-Dorgan's perceptions became a trifle vague and fuzzy.

When they cleared he found that he was sitting in the edge of the light. A little beyond another man sat, shaking his head slowly back and forth Luke saw that a leather truck strap was cinched tightly about the other's elbows.

Pinky Kew said placidly: "I tapped him a little on th' head with a tire iron, Luke. He was gettin' me nervous, jumpin' around that way. Besides, he bit me."

Luke-the-Dorgan got unsteadily to his feet and went back to the cab. His searching fingers found what he was looking for, tipped it above his mouth. He felt better. Then the memory of the night's mission came back to him and he limped back toward the man who sat in the road in the light's edge.

Water trickled down Lieutenant de Campbell's hair; his denims were a symphony of red mud. His eyes glared madly out of the wreck of his face.

"So you're the guy that stole th' major's bed roll," Luke-the-Dorgan observed without animus. "You sure ain't much tuh look at, but I guess it don't take much tuh steal a bed roll—not from Pinky anyhow. Well, Buddy, you're goin' tuh lead me an' Pinky back tuh that bed roll right now."

Strange sounds issued from Lieutenant de Campbell's mouth. He spat out red mud and his speech took on a semblance of coherence. Lieutenant de Campbell was laboring under a strain.

"Get that thus-and-so strap off me!" he said. "I'll break your necks! I'll put you in the guard house for the rest of your natural lives! I'll—"

"Not while that strap holds, yuh won't," Luke-the-Dorgan observed placidly. "It's a good strong strap, too."

Lieutenant de Campbell's voice rose hysterically. "Do you know who I am? I'm Lieutenant de Campbell, you half-wits! I'm General Crofton's aide! Untie that confounded strap, I tell you!"

Pinky Kew had partaken of the refreshments in the cab and now he rejoined the party. He looked down critically while he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Naw," he said decisively. "You ain't no aide. You're uppity enough to be an aide but you're too dirty. I've seen this de Campbell bird an' he's always dolled up like a plush horse."

Lieutenant de Campbell made choking sounds and heaved at the truck strap. It didn't give. Luke-the-Dorgan's voice was a little impatient.

"Dog-face," he said, "we ain't got all night. We're goin' tuh put you in th' back of th' G. M. C. an' you're going tuh show us where you took th' major's bed roll. Pinky'll sit back there with you just in case we should meet any Purples. If we should, you better be a quiet little lamb, or Pinky'll tap you over the head again with th' tire iron. Understand?"

There was a rasp in Lieutenant de Campbell's voice.

"Your damned bed roll is at Collin's Camp," he said. "I'll just be tickled to death to go back there with you, and when I get there— Drive on!"

THE two of them loaded him into the back of the truck, sat him down on a wet tarpaulin with his back against the front seat. Pinky Kew sat beside him and tapped out a little tune on the floor boards with his tire iron. Luke-the-Dorgan climbed back into the front seat and the motor grumbled into life again.

They went two miles along the concrete and then turned left into a road of red mud. Collin's Camp lay that way, Luke knew. With a little luck they could slip into the camp, get the bed roll and be on their way again. The major would be sore because they were late, but they could tell him that the truck had broken down.

It was a half an hour later when Luke's ears caught a faint sound above the wheezing rattle of the engine. He slowed to listen, heard again the regular *slap-thud, slap-thud* of a column of infantry. Dim figures emerged out of the rain and into the beam of his head light a hundred yards away. He pulled to the side of the road and stopped.

"Purples," he said cautiously into the back of the truck. "Put the 'paulin over that bird's head, Pinky, an' keep him quiet. These fellers are likely tuh be curious."

"I'll take care of 'im," Pinky said grimly.

The column slogged on in the rain—marching without an advance guard, Luke-the-Dorgan saw. The leading company went on by the truck without halting and then an officer slopped up to the cab with the rain streaming off the brim of his campaign hat.

"What truck's this?" he demanded.

There was trouble ahead, Luke saw. He thought swiftly and hoped that the captain couldn't smell the refreshments on his breath.

"Special detail after th' major's bed roll," he said quickly.

A second shadowy figure joined the first by the cab and the voices of the two were a harsh murmur in the rain. The second said; "Lieutenant de Campbell was to send a man to direct us at the crossroad ahead, sir. 'The major's bed roll' was to be the countersign, you remember."

"I remember." The man who had spoken first swung back toward Luke-the-Dorgan. "Did Lieutenant de Campbell send you? Speak up, man! We haven't got all night! The head of the column will be at the crossroads in another ten minutes! Which way do we turn there? Left or right?"

"Uh, left, sir," Luke-the-Dorgan told him. "Th' lootenant wants yuh to turn left."

"Left, you hear, Murtaugh? Good! Get the word up to Captain Nelson at the head of the column immediately!"

The rain swallowed the two and Luke-the-Dorgan wiped moisture, which was not rain, from his forehead while shadowy figures continued to march by at the side of the road. There were confused and scuffling sounds in the back of the truck; then those sounds subsided suddenly.

Pinky Kew anounced in a placid

voice: "Had tuh hit 'im again, Luke. He seemed tuh get all excited when yuh told them brass hats tuh turn off left. What'd yuh tell 'em left for, anyway?"

"Because as long as they keep marchin' in that direction they'll be gettin' farther away from where we're goin'. I've seen enough of the Purple army for one night."

"By golly, they'll end up in Kukui Swamp if they keep goin' that way," Pinky said. "Something tells me they're goin' tuh be mad."

Presently the shadowy column was gone from the far side of the road, the *slap-thud* dying away into the rain. Luke lifted the bottle took a long pull and handed it back to Pinky.

"What a night," he said sourly. "I wish I had gone on back to th' major. A nice, peaceful jail would look good to me right now."

"What th' hell," Pinky told him in a cheerful voice. "We're seein' the country, ain't we? What more do yuh want? Let's get goin' before this bird back here bites me again."

THE rain was stopping when Luke-the-Dorgan slowed, reached down to cut off the light. The G.M.C. rolled into the shelter of a patch of algeroba trees, came to a gentle stop. The two dismounted. Collin's Camp was a hundred yards ahead.

"What about this punk in back?" Pinky asked.

"Leave him be." There were further muffled and profane sounds from beneath the tarpaulin. "He'll keep nice an' warm there. When we go back we'll dump him off at th' bridge where we picked him up. Let's go."

"I wisht I had a pencil," Pinky said reflectively. "I've heard some words tonight I ain't ever heard before. I wouldn't want tuh forget 'em."

"Come on, stupid!"

It was as dark as the inside of a whale as they felt their way out into the road again. Wires caught at Luke-the-Dorgan's ankles and he tripped forward on his face; got up swearing. Then he spat thoughtfully and knelt down again, feeling with his hands in the mud.

"You got any wire cutters, Pinky?" he asked.

"Sure. Back in th' truck. What you want wire cutters for, Luke?"

"You remember that bird back in th' truck said headquarters was here at Collin's Camp? That means th' brigade is here an' I just tripped over their telephone lines. Telephone lines mean trouble, so when we come back with the major's bed roll we'll just clip them wires in case anybody might take it into their heads tuh do a little telephonin' around about us."

"By golly, Luke, you think of everything, don't yuh?" Pinky said admiringly.

"I got to—with you around."

A dozen low tents were a dirty gray under the trees in front of them as they stopped for a moment to listen. Lights glowed faintly here and there; a hum of voices was busy against the night.

"We'll start with th' first tent an' look in 'em all," Luke-the-Dorgan said grimly. "That's our best bet."

"Naw." Pinky Kew's voice was cheerful. "That John back in th' truck told me where th' bed roll was—that was after I hit him again with th' tire iron. I hit 'im a good one an' it loosened him up some."

"Well, let's have it," Luke said grudgingly. "It's the first time I ever knew you tuh show any real sense."

"Th' big tent over by th' fence," Pinky said. "Maybe if we work around we can slip in th' back of it without nobody seein' us."

They crept off through the darkness. On their left a low bustle filled the headquarters; shadowy figures went back and forth in the rain, which was beginning to drip again.

"Here it is," Pinky whispered finally.

"This is th' big tent all right. It sounds quiet. Probably it's just a supply tent an' there ain't anybody in it."

"Yeah, an' maybe we'll get a ten-day pass out of tonight's work," Luke-the-Dorgan said gloomily. "But it ain't likely. Well, let's get started."

He squatted down and lifted the loose back flap of the tent. A turned down lantern sat on a folding table and, in its faint light, he saw scattered equipment. Something which looked like a bed roll lay against the tent wall at one side; across from it and in the shadows a man lay on a cot and snored gently. It didn't look like a supply tent but that couldn't be helped.

Luke beckoned Pinky closer and whispered harshly in his ear.

"There's a feller asleep on a cot over there." He gestured with his thumb. "Th' supply sergeant, maybe. You watch him. If he wakes up tip him over an' wrap his head in the blankets while I look for that condemned bed roll. Then when I yell, you run to beat hell for th' truck. Understand?"

"Yeah," Pinky said.

GENERAL CROFTON, commander of the seaward regiments, was at peace with the world. Things had quieted down in the headquarters tent a half an hour ago and now he had come across the way and stretched himself on his cot for a short doze before the dawn attack started.

He turned down the lantern and stretched himself out, folding his hands across his chest and grunting comfortably as he stared at the black shadow which the lantern cast on the roof of the tent. It had been a good day—an excellent day, he reflected. He turned a little so that he could see the dark bulk of Major Gilhooley's bed roll lying against the far wall smiled contentedly. That damned McGuire would try and pull a fast one on *him*, would he? Well, McGuire would have a good fat headache when dawn broke and he saw the Ninety-second in position.

"Hah!" General Crofton said and resumed his peaceful reflections.

Then there was de Campbell. Smart fellow, de Campbell. He'd handled this thing well. No fuss, no uproar, and yet the thing was done. He'd see that young de Campbell was mentioned in his report of the affair.

Wind rustled the algerobas and rain made a gentle and soothing murmur against the canvas over his head. Just as he dozed he thought that he heard the sound of a truck; it was gone then and his mouth dropped a little open as he began to snore gently.

He dreamed that the department commander stood over him and the department commander held a star in his hand; was stooping to pin that new star beside the one which he already wore on his shoulder strap. There was a distinct aroma to the department commander's breath. The general awoke, then.

For a minute he lay there, blinking in the dim light and trying to remember where he was. Then with a start he realized that a man *was* bending over him; that another man was pawing about the heap of baggage at the front of the tent.

"What—what? Here! What goes on here?" the general began.

He didn't finish. The cot suddenly tipped and he hit the floor while rough hands began to wind the blankets about his head. He kicked out and then someone sat down heavily on his well padded middle and drove the wind out of him. He tried to swear but there was no satisfaction in the smothered "Gug—gug" which was all he could manage.

A voice said, then: "I got it, Pinky! Let's go!"

"Yuh can take your time, Luke," another voice said. "I put a couple of half hitches about this feller's neck an' he ain't goin' tuh get loose in a hurry."

The general knew that it was so. Twenty minutes later, when his chief-of-

staff came to tell him about the wrecked command post, they had to cut him loose.

"Bushwhacked in my own headquarters!" the general said. By the— Get out of my sight, you selling platers!"

THEY tossed the major's bed roll into the back of the truck, heard their passenger grunt as it struck him. Luke-the-Dorgan backed the G.M.C. into the road and slid down from behind the wheel.

"Give me them wire cutters."

He felt in the darkness; gathered the twisted wires across his knees and began to cut. Pinky squatted beside him.

"What's tuh keep them birds from wanderin' out here an' findin' where the wires are cut an' patchin' 'em together again, Luke? We got a long ways tuh go an' they'd have plenty of time."

"It'll take some patching when I get through," Luke-the-Dorgan told him sourly. "Grab hold of th' ends which lead up th' road and tie 'em to the truck. We'll drag 'em up there a half a mile or so an' they'll have tuh drag 'em back before they do any splicing. Get moving!"

"By golly, yuh think of everything, Luke!"

The last wire was cut and the last end had been tied to the back of the truck. Luke climbed to the wheel, reached down to turn on the light. The rain had begun again; ahead, the road was a soppy red ribbon.

"Hang on," he said.

The G.M.C. rolled slowly. He shifted to second and slammed his foot against the accelerator. For a second the truck hung almost motionless, as though a giant hand was holding it back. Then the ancient engine roared enthusiastically and the G.M.C. bounded forward with the mud spraying back from her chains in a red sheet. Luke-the-Dorgan glanced back over his shoulder just in time to see one of the gray tents lift from its moorings and come bounding across the night, leaving a trail of destruction in its wake. Voices bellowed against the night.

"You idiot!" Luke-the-Dorgan howled. "You tied the wrong end of them wires to th' truck—we're towin' the brigade switchboard an' th' brigade switchboard tent along behind us! I'll twist that tire iron around your neck once I get you alone!"

"What'll I do, Luke?"

"Hang on!"

The G.M.C. was rolling now, Luke-the-Dorgan stepped harder on the throttle and the wind began to slap harder against his face. Behind there was still a clatter and a bang as they towed the luckless switchboard, but the yells were fainter. Then a jerk almost wrenched his hands from the wheel; the truck hung suspended for a moment, then galloped on with a mad abandon. The wires had parted and the brigade switchboard lay back in the muddy ditch.

They turned onto the concrete and Pinky Kew's voice said plaintively at Luke's shoulder: "We goin ' tuh stop at the bridge an' throw this John out, Luke? He just tried tuh bite me again an' his language is something terrible."

"We'll stop at nothing," Luke-the-Dorgan told him. "We're going to the C.P. with that bed roll before you let some other halfwit steal it. We'll take that bird along as a prisoner."

They rode on into the night.

There was a sentry at the edge of the algerobas where the road turned off to go to the battalion C.P. He stepped out into the glare of the headlight and threw down on the approaching truck with his rifle.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

Luke-the-Dorgan stood up on the brake and the G.M.C. slid to a stop. As the sentry came toward them Luke dropped the empty bottle into the road, heard it roll down into the ditch. A faint apprehension concerning the night's work was beginning to steal over him.

"Privates Dorgan an' Kew," he said meekly. "Reportin' with th' major's bed roll an' one prisoner."

"Pass, friends," the sentry said in the tone one uses in the presence of the dead. "Pass. Th' major'll be glad tuh see you. He's been lookin' for yuh since seven o'clock last night."

The truck rolled on down between the dripping trees and Luke-the-Dorgan's feeling of apprehension deepened. Then he remembered that wrecked switchboard back at Collin's Camp and felt suddenly ill. There was going to be a good bit of trouble descend upon a truck driver and his assistant, he surmised.

He pulled the truck to a stop as a voice bellowed at him out of the darkness—Major Gilhooley's voice. A dim figure was coming with long strides and the thin beam of a flashlight stabbing ahead of it.

"Dorgan!"

"Yes sir. Right here, sir. We brought th' major's bed roll—"

Profanity crackled through the trees. Luke-the-Dorgan fancied that he could feel his soggy clothes drying beneath that blast. Words like "jail," "boil in oil," "draw and quarter" beat unpleasantly against Luke's ears. Then they stopped abruptly. The major was leaning over with his flashlight, stabbing into the back of the truck.

"What in the name of the seven pink cherubims have you got back here?" he demanded.

"A Purple prisoner, sir," Luke-the-Dorgan said in a small voice. "We picked him up."

A muddy face glared at the major from the end of the truck. A mouth tried to shape words.

"Good Lord," Major Gilhooley said in an awed voice, "it's old Crofton's aide—the immaculate de Campbell!"

Luke-the-Dorgan leaned his head on his hand and was quietly sick. Behind him Lieutenant de Campbell was finding his voice in a terrible story.

THE first sergeant came the next morning and squatted in the mud in front of the pup tent which Luke-the-Dorgan shared with Pinky Kew. Luke stared glumly across the cigarette he was making. He had a headache this morning and his mouth tasted bad.

The first sergeant said: "Quite a party. I should say quite some party."

Luke licked sourly at the cigarette and didn't answer. Pinky Kew crawled out of the pup tent with his hair standing on end. It was a gray, unfriendly morning.

The first sergeant went on in a gentle voice.

"First you lose th' major's bed roll. Then you get drunk an' steal a government vehicle, if you can call a G.M.C. a vehicle. Then you kidnap a general's aide an' yuh beat him over th' head with a tire iron."

"Shut up!" Luke-the-Dorgan said savagely.

The first sergeant turned mildly reproving eyes on him. A mustard colored car had driven in under the algeroba trees and a man with muddy boots and colonel's eagles on his shoulders climbed down and went across to the major's tent.

"Not satisfied with that, you go down to Collin's Camp an' tip General Crofton out of his bunk an' tie a blanket around his neck."

Pinky Kew's eyes suddenly grew round and horrified. He choked and crawled back into the tent to lie down upon his blanket. The first sergeant smiled benignly.

"You give false orders to th' Ninety-second an' they marches fifteen miles an' bogs down in Kukui Marsh. Then, just tuh top it all off, you cuts th' brigade's communications and hauls off their switchboard and dumps it in a ditch. Quite a party! Oh, yes indeedy!"

Pinky Kew lifted his head long enough

to ask: "What they goin' tuh do with us, sarge?"

"Shoot you," the first sergeant said sweetly and left them.

It was two hours later when the first sergeant again approached and informed the two that the major would speak with them in his tent. The first sergeant left, then, making unpleasant sounds and drawing a forefinger suggestively across his throat.

"Well, come on," Luke-the-Dorgan said glumly.

They knocked on the tent pole and a voice said: "Come in." The major was there and with him the tall man in muddy boots and colonel's eagles. The eyes of the two officers were suspiciously red, as though they had been weeping. Or maybe laughing.

The Mick colonel said: "These are the men, Major?"

"Those are the men, Colonel McGuire," Major Gilhooley told him. There was a suspicious quiver in the major's voice but Luke-the-Dorgan didn't notice it.

"Um." The Mick colonel was fixing him with a hard eye. It would be hanging, Luke guessed. Shooting was too easy a death. "Um. Nice looking soldiers, Major. Initiative and ability. Good qualities for a soldier."

"Exactly." The major seemed to be overcome with emotion so that he had to turn away.

"I think that they would make good corporals, Gilhooley. See that they're promoted, will you? And a ten-day pass when we get back to barracks."

"I'll see to it, sir," the major was saying in a shaking voice. "That will be all, men."

They went out and the tent flaps dropped behind them on confused and choking sounds. Luke-the-Dorgan could hear what they were saying as he and Pinky went across toward their pup tent.

". . . Fatty Ward marched the Ninety-second fifteen miles in the wrong direction. . . ."

". . . tied old Crofton in his blanket with a rope around his neck. . . ."

"Corporals," Pinky Kew said in an awed voice. "You an' me—corporals!"

"I *will* be damned," Luke-the-Dorgan agreed with him.

BACK in headquarters the old man shuffled the papers on his shiny desk while he looked at the Mick colonel.

"Silly idea," he grumbled. "Sending messages in bed rolls when you've got telephones."

The Mick colonel grinned.

"You've got to admit it worked, General."

"Oh well," the old man said, "the seaward regiments were getting too uppity anyway."

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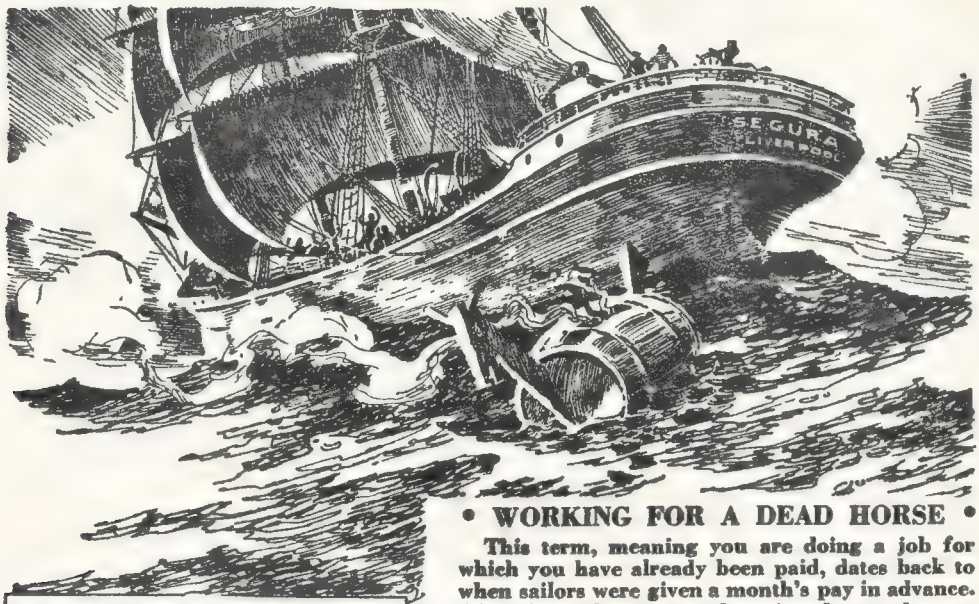
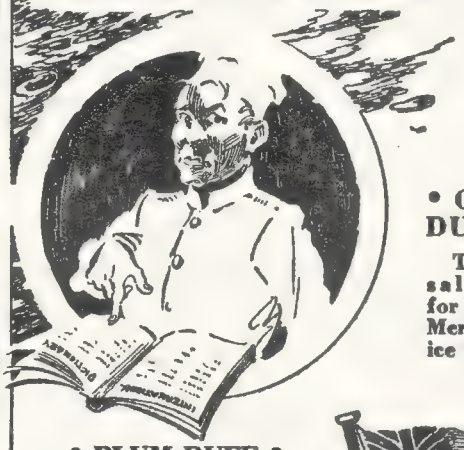


• WORKING FOR A DEAD HORSE •

This term, meaning you are doing a job for which you have already been paid, dates back to when sailors were given a month's pay in advance. After thirty days at sea they rigged up a dummy horse, set him afire, and cast him adrift, while they sang the old chantey "Poor Old Horse." This intimated they were once more working for wages and not alone for their "salt horse" (food).

• HALYARDS •

These hoisting ropes were originally named yard-hauls, because they hauled the yards into place. But the name was too similar to out-hauls and in-hauls (ropes for an entirely different purpose), so they reversed the name to haul-yards, later halyards.

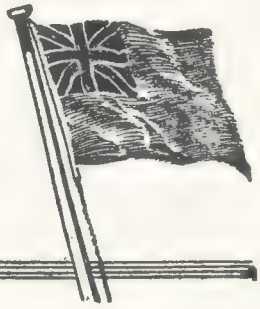


• PLUM DUFF •

If R-O-U-G-H spells rough, and T-O-U-G-H spells tough, then D-O-U-G-H spells DUFF, decreed an old-time sea-cook. That is why any kind of pudding is always called plum duff.

• OLD RED DUSTER •

The universal nickname for the British Merchant Service ensign.



"I'll handle this, mister!"

ANY TONNAGE— ANY OCEAN

By JOHN HAWKINS

THE *China Prince* slammed her blunt bow into the smoking swells of the North Pacific, reeled, dove, and came up with a savage roll, like a fighter shaking his head to clear his eyes, and slammed into the next one. Eight days out of Kobe, with a hell trip behind her, and Seattle ahead. Somewhere beyond the dripping horizon, somewhere beyond that cloudy rushing sea, lay land and rest for Jamie Strund, if not for the *China Prince*.

Jamie Strund's fifteen years of service showed in his thining hair, his bowed shoulders. The uniform coat, like the man that wore it, was old. The gold braid on the cuff tarnished, one band hanging limply over the shiny serge. Strund absently tucked it back in place as he turned at the head of the after deck ladder and walked forward.

He'd never been one for gold braid. Hated it, in spite of the fact that his cap carried "Chief Engineer" lettered above its bill. Hell, it wasn't gold braid down below. It was shining pistons, roaring fires hissing steam, too hot to see, that counted. Gold braid didn't

matter, nor did fresh paint skippers. Jamie Strund and the *China Prince* had seen a lot of skippers come and go, more than he cared to remember.

That was over now. He was through. The skipper had handed him an anchor in Shanghai. It wasn't much of a surprise; he'd known from the minute the pup came aboard that they'd never work smoothly.

Like the number one piston, for instance. The skipper was all for uniform and paint. And Jamie Strund, after all these years on the *China Prince*, didn't believe in covering a broken joint with fresh paint.

They'd tried to change the *China Prince*. New bright work, gallons of paint, and five new cabins. She was a "Cabin Ship to the Orient" now. But they hadn't changed the old tub any more than they'd changed him. Fresh paint, new cabins, and a bright young skipper.

It took more than these to rebuild the *Prince*. What she really needed was a new engine. New boilers, and a new propeller.

Jamie Strund knew the *Prince*, knew every leaky joint, every cracked plate, and every sour pump. He knew that underneath that shiny paint she was the same old ship. Good, sturdy, and seaworthy. If only they'd give him an engine.

Well, not him—he was through. But at least they ought to put some new supplies down below for his successor. Or one of these days that crack in the propeller shaft, that he'd been nursing so carefully, would widen, and there would be a sweet case of salvage for some one. Or the warped propeller would twist off, and some of those bad plates buckle. Then she'd go down like a ripped tin can. Or—Strund could think of a dozen things that might happpen—could happen now.

The *Prince* needed a spell in dry dock, needed it badly.

THE *Prince* rose on the crest of a wave, dropped, then staggered into the next swell. Strund paced the lee deck. A wayward gust of wild slapped spray against the deck house. Strund shivered, and kept going, the collar of his uniform coat up around his ears. He needed a great-coat. If only that smooth tongued youngster hadn't sold him that brightly printed paper that wasn't worth the blaze it would make. No, he couldn't afford one now; there'd be trouble enough stretching his small savings. There weren't enough berths for young men, let alone the old-timers.

He was aft, at the head of the ladder going down to the after well deck, when he heard the suddenly exploding curse. He hadn't time to move before the men boiled out of the messroom door.

The mass broke, scattered along the deck. A tall blond seaman, the Swede, and two short dark men. All ringed around Terry, the second assistant's oiler, waiting for an opening. The fight between the deck force had broken out again. Four to one. The Swede leaped in, as Terry turned to curse the dark men. His arms wrapped around Terry's neck. The three circled around, and while Strund watched, rushed the big oiler.

"Break it up!" Strund went down the ladder, "Break it up, I say!"

He might as well have saved his breath. The wind snatched the words from his lips. The sound never reached the fighting men. Strund's hand fumbled in his hip pocket for the spanner wrench that should have been there—and wasn't! The skipper had ideas about uniforms and greasy tools. "Damn a gold braid ship."

He ran aft, over the heeling deck. Green water climbed the rail, sloshed in the scuppers. The fight swarmed aft, over the number five hatch.

Terry's curse cracked out. He shook one of the sailors loose, sunk a swinging

boot in the Swede's belly, and backhanded the shortest of the sailors across the deck.

"Come on, you deck scum. I'll show you how a black gang man cleans ship." One big arm flailed out, and the swarthy man dropped, as if hit with a cargo boom. Three running steps, and Terry had the big sailor by the throat, shook him like a dog shakes a rat, dropped him. Started for the last man.

Strund searched for a weapon. He had to stop this fight. The skipper would raise hell now. He'd slam Terry in irons, as sure as tomorrow. Look what he'd done in Shanghai, when the crew and the black gang tangled over the matter of deck steam. He was going to throw the whole lot of them in a shore jail. And now, with one black gang man cleaning out the foc'sle, hell was sure to pop. Strund knew that he had to keep Terry out of irons. He needed him below, needed every man to keep the *China Prince* turning over.

It happened almost too fast for the eye to follow. Terry had the sailor, a swarthy Portagee, backed close to the weather rail. He smashed a right hand at his face, then Strund saw steel flash in the light. He heard Terry's roar of rage; saw the two bodies lock together. Strund stood as if bolted to the deck, as the scream cut through the noise of racing feet.

His locked eyes saw the swarthy sailor stiffen, stand straight, then arch his back against the rail. He saw the knife in Terry's hand, dripping red, and then watched the sailor tumble to the deck.

Strund's head jerked around. The mate was at the head of the ladder. When he looked back Terry was alone, green water around his knees.

The *China Prince* shuddered, rolled, and the deck was clean—the sailor gone on a racing sea that licked aboard to snatch the body.

Strund heard the captain yell, saw his face at the ladder top over the mate's shoulder, "What's up? What is this?"

"Below, Terry lad. Below with you."

The big oiler heard the faimliar voice, turned slowly, then dove for the well deck door.

Strund slipped after him. Lightly, the chief followed the big man down the ladder. "The storeroom, Terry!" Strund howled above the noise of the engine.

Lundstrom, the third assistant, heard the voices. The engine noise made it impossible for him to hear the words, but the difference in tone brought his head around. He saw the chief on the top grating, saw the oiler vanish into the storeroom. Once he started for the ladder, but Strund motioned, shook his head, and the third went back to his seat on the bench near the ventilator. If the chief said it was all right, that was good enough for him. He'd made three trips with Strund, and had a lot of respect for a man who could keep an engine, like that in the *China Prince*, together.

STRUND waited on the grating. He heard the click of heels coming down the ladder. He kept his head rigidly down till the feet were level with his eyes. Then he tipped his head up to face the captain.

Captain John Marks, master of the *China Prince*, was a young man, as skippers go. His first trip on the *China Prince*, and he held his ship in the same contempt that he felt for the chief engineer. He deserved a better craft.

"Where'd he go, chief?" The skipper had a forty-five balanced in his big hand. There was scant courtesy in his tone.

Jamie Strund moved over to the tool rack. The heat came up from the engine, like a warm comfortable blanket. Strund watched the captain's face. Then he slowly removed his uniform coat, hung it on the rack.

Strund said, "Who you lookin' for?" He cupped his hand over his ear.

"The man that knifed the Portagee." The skipper's eyebrows were drawn down in a straight line. Flecks of red showed in his eyes. Anger rising there like the water in the boiler glass when the injector valve is cracked.

Strund watched the second officer's bulging eyes.

"I saw you order him below. Where is he?" the second chipped in. Strund hated him then. The master's jackal.

"I'll handle this, mister," the captain cut in.

"Sure I ordered him below, mister," Strund spoke. "I didn't want him mobbed by that scurvy deck crew. Pullin' knives in an honest fight. They was four to one against him, an' one o' them damn spigs had to pull a knife. I'm damn well glad he got it. He had it comin'."

"The police'll settle that ashore." The captain's voice rose over the plunging thrust of the cylinders.

Strund opened his mouth to say, "He ain't here," when the clatter came rattling from the storeroom. Instantly he damned Terry for a clumsy hayshaker.

The skipper heeled around. The big gun jerked up to his waist. "Come out of there, you." With the second officer close behind him he went over the grating to the storeroom.

The dark was thick, and the skipper didn't know where to find the light switch. They stopped just inside the door, eyes searching the gloom.

Strund knew where Terry was within a foot. He knew the inside of the storeroom like he knew the inside of his pocket. Knew that he was against the ship's side, well aft, near the large case of pump packing.

"Damn you, man, come out!" The skipper's voice had an ominous quality about it now. The gun swung jumpily.

Strund came up behind the skipper. It was only a matter of seconds till the skipper's eyes became accustomed to the dark, and would see Terry crouched against the bulkhead, even as Strund did now, over the skipper's shoulder.

He knew, too, that the big man wouldn't come out till he ordered him to. Terry was confused by the enormity of the thing that had just happened, and by the sudden deluge of gold braid.

The skipper saw him! "Stand still." The automatic covered Terry. Strund saw the oiler move, straighten slowly.

"Steady, you. I'll blow your guts out."

Strund saw, as the oiler continued to move, the skipper's finger tighten around the trigger.

Strund's oil-stained hand dipped back to the tool rack. The wrench traveled a neat, quick, arc, knocking the skipper colder than the forward deck plates.

The gun flamed, the bullet screaming off the steel. With the sound still ringing in his ears Strund barked, "Terry, below to the fire room. If you move out of there I'll bash your skull. Lively now."

The big oiler stepped wordlessly past the mate, over the captain's limp body, and went down the ladder. Strund saw the third assistant's gaping mouth, and motioned him to stay where he was.

"We'll take him topside," Strund told the mate. "You grab his ankles, and watch that ladder when she rolls. 'Tis slippery."

THEY got Captain John Marks up the ladder, into his cabin, without any of the passengers seeing them. The weather kept them all in the lounge.

The messman went scurrying for water and ice. Strund chipped the ice into the towel and laid the compress on the skipper's neck. Then he sat quietly in the arm chair and waited for hell to break loose.

It did.

The skipper rolled over, opened his eyes; his fingers fumbled around the

bump on the back of his head. His gaze wandered around the cabin. His feet swung off the bunk. His eyes found Strunk's figure in the chair. The engineer met his eyes, remaining lax, his whole body relaxed aaginst the leather. A thin old man waiting for the wrath to come.

The captain barked, "What're you doin' here, mister?"

"Waitin' for you to come to." Strund saw the question in the captain's eyes. "I clipped you with a wrench."

"You *what?*"

Softly Strund explained. "That Terry's a good oiler, but he ain't got all the brains that's afloat. He was scared to death. I don't blame him much."

The skipper's eyes were the color of case-hardened steel. His hands were two big fists.

"I saw the fight. That Portagee pulled a knife after Terry mopped up all the rest of the crew. They was against the weather rail, aft near the five hatch, and the *Prince* stuck her nose under a big one. In the ruckus the Portagee got his own knife stuck in him, an' a sea took him over the side. See?"

"You're both goin' in irons for mutiny."

"Yeah, I know. I got the guts of a Liverpool fireman, but I had to do it. Terry'd got himself shot, and then we'd been short two men 'stead of one. I need him if we get this pot in on schedule."

"Go below, tell him to report here. He finishes this trip in irons."

Strund's fingers stuffed his pipe. The acrid smell blued the air.

"I will," he spoke slowly, "like hell."

"Then," the skipper rapped, "you go in irons too."

"How long do you think you'd keep the *Prince* under way if you iron'd me? The *Prince's* wore out. It takes all of us to keep her movin'. The rest're good men, but I know the *Prince* and they don't. She won't run twenty-four hours."

"I'll take a chance on that." The skipper's jaw was set. Little ridges of muscle showed along the bone.

Strund smiled bitterly. "Ain't a chance. It's as sure as gulls followin' a ship. She's wore out. The head office spent all the money for paint, to get passengers, but, mister, it"ll take more than a gallon or two of paint to get this ship to port. It's winter, an' the North Pacific is no calm harbor."

"You're relieved of your duties. Bring that oiler topside, and turn over to the first assistant."

The first assistant showed no surprise. "What next?" He lay on his bunk in shorts, a torn copy of "The Marine Engineer" in his hand. "That skipper, he's nuts."

"You take over, Jensen."

"If you say so. I'd like to bend a wrench over his head myself." Jensen fumbled under his bunk for slippers. "'Fore he locks you up, better take a look at that compressor. It's raisin' hell again."

Strund led the way below. The third looked up from the log. The clock over the desk chimed unheard bells. The third read the gauges, noted the readings in the book.

They found the trouble in the condensor, left the third and the water tender to repair it, and went forward to the fire room.

Terry was dozing on the bench against the bulkhead. The fires droned comfortably, the glare dancing on the oily plates. The pumps thumped, steam hissed. The rumble of the engine was the overtone.

Strund was comfortable here. The heat of the engine room warmed his thin blood, got into his old bones, made him feel almost young again.

But the skipper was waiting topside.

He shook Terry awake. "Roll out, oiler."

The big man grunted, opened his eyes, said, "Yes, sir."

Strund told him what had happened.

"Let's tell him to go to hell," Terry suggested, "an' stay here."

Strund shook his head. "Topside, oiler."

They reported to the master. In Strund's absence the skipper had the steward clean out a small storeroom. This was their brig. Together they were locked in, and they slept side by side on the deck, ate off the same tray, while the *China Prince,* bright with paint outside but worn thin below, staggered across the storm-torn North Pacific.

The third day the mess boy told them, as he pushed the tray through the door, "Bottom's out of the glass, storm warning over the radio. She'll be a good one."

Strund ate silently. He was thinking of the engine. What would happen when the storm struck? A breakdown, surely, but what, and how badly? Would Jensen be able to repair it? He was still wondering when he dropped off to sleep.

HE came bolt upright off the deck. He could hear the storm howling past the deckhouse, hear the crash as tons of water piled aboard over the bow. That wasn't what had wakened him. He'd heard storms before, plenty.

Then he knew. The engine had stopped!

While he crouched he heard the faint thump, as the cylinders began again. Slowly, half speed or less. What was wrong now?

Bracing his old body against the roll, his ears strained for the sound of the engine as it went to full speed. It must! But it didn't. Fully three minutes he waited.

Terry was awake too. "God, she's broke down." He was silent, then as the Prince surged upward, "An' in a blow like this."

The storm blotted out the noise of the footsteps outside their door, but they did hear the crash as the lock went. The door banged open. Jensen lurched in. "Come on down below. We blew a tube."

His oil-stained figure was gone. The door swung, then Terry was through, Strund hard on his heels.

The storm got a clean, cold sweep at them as they went down the ladder, ducked into the steam-filled fiddley. Terry's shirt came off. Strund could see the sweat start on the big oiler's face. Heat to warm his blood.

And heat a-plenty. The blown tube was in the starboard boiler. The fireman had let the water out. A fast swinging hammer, and steam filled the fire room. Water, boiling hot, filled the pit in front of the boiler.

"Get that back off, Terry." Strund shed his coat. "I'll get the plug."

Strund had the plug ready by the time the back was off the boiler. He and Jensen located the blown tube through the peepholes; then it was simply a matter of removing the handplate from that tube and driving in a plug.

That's all, but it was a job. With the *Prince* rolling in the trough, wallowing like a hog, it made it anything but an off-watch. The second and an oiler went in, but returned without luck. Sweat dripped off their faces, arms. It was hot back of that boiler. They were cramped for space there, only a scant three feet separated them from the bulkhead.

Strund and Terry went in next. Balanced on the plank, a swinging light showed them the gaping tube. The second had taken the hand plate off. Strund jammed the plug on the short bar. Terry had the hammer.

The engineer had but to place the plug in the hole, Terry to get one clean blow at the bar, and the job was done. Simple, but for the vapor. Steam too hot to see. And that vapor could burn like a cutting torch. Both men wore heavy gloves, but even these weren't protection enough.

They tried several times, the heat stopping them, weakening both men.

"Once more," Strund said. Both men leaned back, their shoulders rubbing the bulkhead. Even it was too hot to touch.

The big oiler nodded. Terry's mouth was open, trying to get air to tortured lungs.

Strund raised the plug, jammed it in the tube end, held it while the vapor burned like hell's own fires. Terry swung the hammer. Spang! The plug slipped home, and the job was done. Three hard blows made it fast. Terry dropped the hammer, gave Strund his shoulder for support.

Out in the fire room Terry soaked Strund's hands and arms in a bucket of oil, while the fireman lit the fires in the boiler.

The popping roar, as the oil ignited under the torch, was music to their ears. A heady thunderous music.

THE speaking tube near the control desk had been piping its thin whistle for a long time when Strund finally opened it, said, "Yes?"

"What's wrong?" the skipper's metalic voice inquired.

"She's fallin' apart. We got her fixed now."

"That you, Strund?"

"Yes, damn it."

"Go back to your cabin, and stay there or I'll iron you to a stanchion."

"Listen, skipper," Strund roared into the tube, "I'm here to stay. You can bring all the cops in Seattle aboard, when we get there. The fiddley doors are locked, and I've rigged a steam hose covering the ladder. If you stick your damn fresh-paint nose down here I'll fry it off your face. That goes for the rest of the crew. Send the steward down with food, if you want to get to port, but stay to hell away from here yourself."

"I could shoot you for this."

"If you like steam, come ahead." Strund plugged the tube, and took over the desk. He made a swift mental calculation, based on the *Prince's* position. If they could keep her running they were only forty-eight hours out of Seattle.

With his thin body braced at the control board Strund eased the ship through the heavy swells. He opened the throttle when the *Prince* reared high, sending the propeller deep. His fingers jammed it shut when the bow went down, bringing the screw clear of the water. The ship trembled in every joint till the racing screw was closed.

If the trip had been a hell trip before, it became to the black gang a long drawn nightmare now. Every moving part ran deep in oil. Strund opened the oil room, and for once they used all they wanted. The bilge pumps broke down constantly. One of the men would get them started again when the water crept over the deck plates.

The black gang ate, slept, standing up. The firemen slept on the deck plates, relieved each other when they woke. As for the oilers, it took two of them to keep oil in the bearings. The other man kept the auxiliaries running.

Strund was at the control desk, his pipe jammed between clenched teeth. As the ship rolled he saw the water sloshing across the deck plates.

"The pump's stopped again," he told the third. "Fix it."

The man disappeared. In a moment he was back, his face noticeably grayer under the oil. "The pump's running. She must have sprung a plate."

Strund cursed. "Start the auxiliary."

"It's broke down."

"Fix it, man. If that water ever gets to the fires we're through." As he spoke the ship heeled, the water raced across the plate inches deep.

White-faced, the man turned to obey. Strund summoned the first assistant to

the control board, and vanished up the ladder.

Feverishly the men worked over the auxiliary pump. The water crept higher around their ankles, and when the ship rolled, came to their knees. It got into the crank pits, and the cylinders sprayed the engine room.

"T'hell with it." The fireman threw down his wrench. "I'm goin' topside before we sink."

He started for the ladder. Three of the men joined him in a mad rush.

Over their heads the steam hose went into action with a loud roar. They looked up. Strund was on the grating over them, lashed to the rail, the steam nozzle, heavily wrapped in burlap, in his hands. The hose was connected to a valve within easy reach. He shut it off.

"Come on, you yellow rats. Come on. I'll burn your heads off your shoulders." The steam hissed from the nozzle. Under full pressure it wasn't visible for three feet from the nozzle end. He tipped the hose down. The steam swept the ladder. The men went back in a rush to escape that white lash.

"Back to work!" Strund's voice came over the roar. "Fix that pump!"

They went back to work after they found the only other exit was locked. Like madmen they worked, and finally the pump cylinder began its thumping beat.

Both pumps couldn't gain on the water, but at least they held it level. The oily bilge crept no higher, and after a while the men went to their tasks. One man stayed near the pump.

THE situation was unchanged. The engineers relieved each other at the throttle. Back of them all was Strund, the wisp of a man, a greasy rag in one hand, a wrench in the other. No one knew how many times he had seen a breakdown coming and forestalled it.

The speaking tube whistled. Strund answered, and the skipper said, "We've made landfall. Can you keep her running another six hours?"

"We've kept her moving this long."

"When we tie up you're under arrest. The owners'll get a full report of your conduct." The skipper's voice was harsh.

Strund was tired. His legs ached from the hours he had been on his feet. He tried to listen to what the skipper was saying, and then he heard the roar of escaping steam.

His numbed brain tried to locate the sound. He tried to think where the break could be. The skipper's voice bellowed in his ear. "The steering engine's gone. She won't answer the helm!"

Gone was the fatigue.

"Rig the emergency wheel. Keep her nose in the wind. Give me an hour!" He plugged the tube.

He called the second assistant to the ladder head. "Stay with this steam hose. If anybody tries to get past you, give them the works. I got to go." He clattered down the ladder. The second shifted his pipe, wiped his hands on the rag. He tried the valve. His eyes swung back to the lower grating. They wouldn't get past him, unless they wanted to walk into the front door of hell.

Terry and the third were already in the after end of the shaft valley. The steam pipes to the steering engine ran along the shaft alley, then up a narrow manhole to the steering engine. A small engine, little larger than Terry's body, that already blocked the steam-filled hole.

"I shut her off," the third told Strund. "Terry's gone to see which joint blew. We'll have to ship a new one."

They waited till the big oiler came back. He straddled the slowly turning shaft. "Near the top, six foot length, ripped like a rotten sack."

The third departed on a run for the storeroom to cut a new length of pipe, put the flanges on. Terry crouched

alongside of Strund. "She'll be a job. That valve leaks a little."

Strund swore. That meant they'd have to fight the vapor while they changed the pipe.

The *Prince* rose on a huge wave. Water rushed down the shaft alley deck, sloshed around their legs.

"Gettin' worse," Terry commented, and Strund swore again.

Terry had heavy gloves on when the third returned. He and the fireman carried the pipe, wrenches, oil to loosen the bolts, and rope.

"Wait," Strund disappeared down the shaft alley, came back carrying a coat. "Put this on. You'll get hell burnt out of you anyway."

Silently the big man obeyed. Pocketing the wrenches, he climbed up, vanished in the clouding steam.

The shaft brought the sounds to them. They heard the wrenches click on steel. After what seemed hours the broken section of pipe hurtled down, glanced off the shaft, narrowly missing the fireman.

"I'll take the line up." Strund knotted the rope around his waist. The third offered his shoulder as a step. Strund's hand caught the lowest rung of the ladder. He pulled himself up, up into the white cloaking steam. The shaft alley, with the water swishing over the deck plates, was blotted from sight.

He climbed. Each succeeding rung must be the last. The heaving roll of the ship, barely under way, threw his body against the hot pipes.

Terry's feet appeared. Strund raised his hand, clasped the ankle. The voice rocked hollowly from above him: "Where's the line?"

Strund loosed the line, passed it over his head. It came taut. Strund waited till the pipe was beside him. His hand caught the end, pulled it up.

"We got to go up," Terry yelled. "I came down to get out of the heat."

They climbed, with the heat increasing with every rung. Terry climbed past the lower end, going up till he was opposite the top flange. It was a one-hand job. There wasn't room between the ladder and the shaft wall for a bracing leg.

THAT job, of putting the length of pipe in place, with each man able to spare only one hand, was hell. The vapor hissed from the open end of the pipe, vapor that burned like the boiler fire.

Finally, after several unsuccessful attempts, they stopped, while Strund lashed his body to the ladder.

The hottest job was the lower end, the end closest to the boiler. But while Strund's hands were close to this, so were Terry's legs. It took iron control to remain steady while the steam scorched the flesh.

They did it. Laying the pipe between the flanges, dropping a bolt through each flange to hold it in place.

With blistered fingers Strund tightened the lower bolts while Terry cinched the top ones down. Steam hissed between the flange lips. The wrench was hot in his hands. The diving lunge of the *Prince* threw him against the pipe. He felt the burn through his coat.

The ship wallowed deep in a trough, staggered up, and Strund again went against the pipe. He felt the pipe sear the flesh, then dropped till the rope held him. Each roll swung him back and forth in the narrow shaft.

The steam made it impossible for Terry to see. He worked by sense of touch entirely. At last the topside flange was tight. He lowered his body, knowing by the sound that the lower flange still leaked.

His questing feet found the line that held Strund. He climbed down, jammed a leg between the engineer's swinging body and the hot pipe. His lip caught between his teeth as the vapor bit into already burned flesh.

Two more. His hands, in the heavy

gloves, fumbled for bolts, fitted them home, twisted the nuts in place, and then the wrench clinched them tight.

Lifting the wrench he beat a swift tattoo on the steel. The wrench slipped from his hand, but he knew by the sudden clamor that the steering engine had come to life.

He got the line adrift. Wrapped his hand in the slack of Strund's collar, and started down, one slow rung after another. He didn't know how long it took till the propeller shaft came into view below Strund's swinging heels. The third's face was twisted up, his hands reached up to help.

Then they were on the shaft alley deck. The third yelled, "The oil, man." The fireman leaped for the bucket of dynamo oil that was waiting. Gently, they rubbed it into the burned flesh,

After a time Strund's eyes flicked open,

"How?" he began.

"Under way," the third told him, "and the pumps are holding the water level now."

Terry made his painful way out of the shaft alley. Strund leaned heavily on his shoulder. The second assistant was still at the ladder head. The steam hose still covered the ladder. A wintry smile twisted the second's lips as Strund came up the rungs.

"Tug alongside," he said.

It was a sadly battered ship that steamed alongside the tug. Two of the lifeboats were gone, the glass in the wheelhouse smashed, the starboard rail gone.

A sadly battered *Prince,* but there was still steam enough in the boiler for a lusty, raucous blast of the whistle.

STRUND'S ticket, with the others, was screwed to the messroom wall. He took the screwdriver out of his pocket, for a long moment stared at the dark frame. His ticket. Chief Engineer, Any Tonnage, Any Ocean. It had been there for a long time. Oh well, land would be good for him. He loosened the first screw.

A voice behind him stopped the work. "The captain wishes to see you, sir."

He found the captain at his desk. "Sit down." The man wrote busily for a moment, then spun to face the engineer. "You ready to go ashore?"

"I'll have to change to my shore kit first."

"No hurry. Better take time to make out a list of repairs needed below. We're goin' to drydock tomorrow."

Strund turned to the door.

The master continued, "I don't think we can get a new engine, but anything else I'm sure we can."

Strund stepped through the door. His shoulder hurt like the devil. He caught the captain's words, "Maybe the next trip won't be so hard on us."

"On us?"

"Sure. If you don't want to stop ashore, we'd like to have you next trip."

Strund said, "Thank you, sir," then swung back to ask, "About Terry?"

"Your men are your concern, Strund. It's up to you."

In the mess room the screws had been tightened, holding Strund's ticket snug against the wall. "Jamie Strund, Chief Engineer, Any Tonnage, Any Ocean," was there for all the world to see.

In his cabin, dressed in his shore kit, Strund crouched over his desk.. Two valves, a handful of pipe fittings, and a loose piece of pump packing had been pushed back to make room for the paper.

"Let's see, if they'd retube the boilers, give him a couple of new pumps, a bit of new steampipe, a new generator, the *China Prince'd* be a real ship again. Oh yes, a new pressure pump—"

Jamie Strund, chief engineer of the *China Prince,* chewed his tongue as he wrote. His bandaged wrist held lightly on the paper, and his hand leaving an oil stain as it traveled across the sheet.

The Camp-Fire

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet.

A RETIRED naval officer who withholds his name from publication picks a bone with Ared White's spy novelette (September issue) in which German code was broadcast in a meaningless blur of speed and finally solved by catching it on a phonograph record and running it off at a slower rate. Our reply to the criticism is that Ared White was writing fiction, and in fiction no holds are barred so long as you do not break with probability, or plausibility, or known fact. In other words, skipper, you won't find Treasure Island on your charts, or the Flying Dutchman in Lloyd's Register, but what of it? But your letter is interesting and I hope some comrades will give us the song you want. It sounds good.

I have a comment to make upon Ared White's "Zeppelin Raider" and a request for the words of an old song.

My comment on Ared White's story is based on my own experience in Aviation Intelligence with our Naval Forces in France, where I landed at Boulogne sur Mer on March 24, 1918.

Ared White may have some information which the Navy did not get on which to base his story, but in the Navy we got a more prosaic account of how the Nauen "whine" was broken, and the credit went to the British Naval Intelligence service, where some bright Johnny got the idea of taking down the "whine" on a phonograph at high speed and then running the record slowly till the code came clear.

It did not come out till after the war, even to us in the U. S. Naval Intelligence service in France, but the British Navy had a very skilled diver P. O. who specialized in entering every German sub that was sunk within diving depth around the British Isles at least, and hunting for their code books, which the German submarine officers did not always have time or opportunity to destroy. Thanks to this man, who was finally promoted to Carpenter Lieutenant, the British Naval Intelligence service usually had the current German codes and mine field charts, but they kept this so dark till after the war that Germany never did get wise to how the British broke his codes.

It is very possible that this diver found some phonograph records aboard a sub that gave his Naval Intelligence service the tip on how to break the Nauen "whine"; but I seriously doubt if any American intelligence officer had to ride a Zep to discover it. Incidentally, the British Naval Intelligence had an agent planted as a high officer at the German Admiralty throughout the war, and he might have given the tip on how to decode the Nauen broadcasts.

For sending, I am informed that the Germans used a Telepost high speed telegraph transmitter and not a phonograph, for no wax record would stand the strain of transmitting at the speed Nauen used in broadcasting. This Telepost machine was an American invention which I had a chance to inspect while at college in 1907. Its promoters essayed to compete with the Western Union and the Postal Telegraph but met too rough going, and the invention proved a flop as far as this country was concerned. The Germans, however, saw its mechanical merits and used it at Nauen.

Mechanically, the Telepost apparatus consisted of a special typewriter which punched holes, corresponding to dot and dash letters, in a reinforced high speed type of ticker tape, which was then run through a special telegraph transmitter at a rate up to five hundred letters a minute. As invented, the dots and dashes were recorded by an electric needle on a chemically treated tape that was run through the receiving instrument at equal speed. The Germans probably did substitute a phonograph for the receiving instrument as simpler, lighter and less bulky to carry aboard subs and Zeps.

Now for the song. About forty years ago a playmate used to sing a lively ditty about the adventures of some bucolic visitor to a county fair. I never did learn all the words of this song but the refrain comes to my mind whenever I find myself in a "hec(k)tic" situation, and runs as follows:

"Never had such a time in all my life!
I lost my team and I couldn't find my wife!!
NEVER-HAD-SUCH-A-TIME-*IN-ALL-MY-LIFE!!!*
As I had at the County Fair!"

I will much appreciate any information Camp-Fire correspondents can give as to the words and where to find the music of this song.

TO accompany his novelette of the last man in Custer's last stand, H. Bedford-Jones gives us this note:

The presumption of writing another Custer story may be excused by the viewpoint here taken.

I believe the details will be found correct, so far as is humanly possible. The flag incident is based on a letter from Charley Hayward, whose claim to have been an actual survivor of the fight came too late to be proven or disproven; the flag which he claims to have saved has passed, I believe, into the hands of a private collector. I've tried to get the feeling of the rank and file, as reported by several contemporaries. The touch about the mosquitos, for example, came from one man concerned. A former member of the regiment, who was with Benteen, provided the fact that many of the enlisted men served under assumed names. The feeling of the men toward certain officers was no secret, but was probably little more than the usual grousing. Men like to shoot off their mouths.

In this Little Big Horn scrap, one guess is as good as another. The conjecture that Custer shot himself, merely hinted at here, is the opinion of some experts who have studied the evidence for years; no Army man would admit it, of course. Other things might have been hinted at, also, but to what purpose? What I wanted to get was the sequence as the enlisted man saw it—the old army veteran of the best type.

WE'LL accede to the request of Comrade P. Schuyler Miller, of Scotia, New York, and print this appeal for the locations of early Indian villages.

It seems to me that The Camp-Fire is the place to present my plea. I am a member of the Van Epps-Hartley Chapter of the New York State Archeological Association. Our headquarters are at Schenectady, and we have taken as our study area parts of the Mohawk, upper Hudson, Hoosick, Sacandaga and Schoharie river valleys. We are working, both independently and in cooperation with the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences, to cast further light on the story of the Indians in eastern New York State—and believe me, though that story may not be as spectacular as that of the Mound Builders, or the Pueblo Indians of the southwest, it is as intricate a detective story as you will find anywhere in the United States.

When the first white settlers came to New York State, most of the country west of the Schoharie River was occupied by Indians of the five Iroquois nations—the Mohawks, the Onondagas, the Oneidas, the Cayugas, and the Senecas. They fought with the British, first against France and later against the American colonists in the Revolution. East of the Schoharie, and all through New England, were tribes like the Mahikans, the Wappingers, the Pequots, the Penobscots, and the Mic-Macs, speaking the Algonkin tongue. They had inhabited eastern North America before the Iroquois appeared in New York, and were driven east by them.

Historic records tell us a lot about the Iroquois. The first ethnologists, like Morgan, visited them before they had forgotten their native arts and customs. Their deserted village sites, some of them dating back before the coming of the white man, are easy to identify. On the other hand, there are vast quantities of prehistoric remains that date back thousands of years before the Dutch and before the Iroquois. Some of them must have been left by Algonkin tribes, because they were there before the Iroquois. But which ones?

The Mahikans lived in the Hudson valley before the Dutch came. There were Wappingers and Minsi south of them, Manhattans on the island that took their name, many

other tribes in the vicinity of New York. They held out as long as they could against the white man, and finally died away. Theirs was the first country to be settled, and they were the first to disappear.

Consider what happened. In a few years the Hudson River tribes were shifted from the Stone Age to the Age of Metals. They must have been using their old-fashioned flint arrowheads and clay pots at the same time that they were trading furs for the white man's muskets and brass kettles. If we can find a Mahikan village, let us say, we will know what kind of arrows and pottery the Indians who lived there were using before Hudson sailed into New York Harbor. Then when we find another village, in some other part of the state, with the same kind of arrows and the same type of pottery, it will be safe to assume that the people who lived there were Mahikans, even though there is no historic record of them.

Traditions and early records will show where the villages or "castles" of the Indians were located when the white man came. Most of them are buried under our present-day cities, though it is not so long since there were arrowheads at Dyckman Street in New York City. There are others which can still be investigated, if we can find them, and which will provide the clue that may enable us to unravel the tangle of ancient peoples that seems to exist in New York.

Surely the readers must number some collectors of Indian relics, and students of early history. Each of them knows his own territory better than any man alive. He knows where those Algonkin towns were, and what kind of material comes from them. He has in his possession the clue that we—and archeologists like us all over the country—are looking for.

Unfortunately, we have very few members who have explored the eastern part of New York State, where those historic Algonkin villages are located. What I want to do is find the people who do know that part of the world, persuade them to cooperate with us in identifying the historic sites, and have them help us in getting photographs or specimens of what is found there. If any reader has such information at his disposal, or knows who has, I will greatly appreciate his getting in touch with me. We want to know four things to begin with: where the villages are which were occupied when the Dutch settled in eastern New York, what Indian tribe lived there, how long they lived there (that is, what the old records have to say about them), and what relics they left behind them.

Amateurs are the people who can do most to solve the mystery of the Indians. There are too few professional archeologists to do anything like the work that must be done, before the people who want only curios and souvenirs have destroyed what clues remain. In our chapter we have some forty amateurs —some of us collectors, some merely curious to see what we can find out. We are slowly learning from the professional archeologists at Rochester, and Albany, and Washington how to go about investigating the Indian remains that we find, and how to make sure that we do not overlook any single clue, no matter how unimportant it may seem. The fact that two arrows lie together under a flat stone may change our entire theory of pre-historic peoples by proving that the two tribes that made them lived at the same time instead of centuries apart.

CAN anyone help Clem W. Johnson, of Boca Grande, Florida? He writes this to Camp-Fire:

I have read every book that I can find on the subject and have had the Naval Records searched for information concerning the once famous pirate chief, Gasparilla, with little reward.

If you know any of the following facts, or know where I can obtain them, I would be most grateful if you would so advise me.

The exact date of his capture or death.

The length and tonnage and number of guns of his ship.

Number in his crew.

TO all these comrades, thanks for their letters: Richard D. Sparks, Somerville, Mass.; Rupert Harrison, Kohukohu, New Zealand; Dr. Montague Boyd, Atlanta, Ga.; H. E. Pinkerton, Coolidge, Ariz.; Henry Lee Hohnberg, Albuquerque, N. M.; Fred R. Edwards, Long Island City, N. Y.; H. R. Corners, Chaton, Ala.; C. De Burgeni, Hollywood, Calif.; John T. Prince, Los Angeles, Calif.; R. L. McBeth, Fruita, Colorado; Larry Smith, Woodworth, Montana; Arch Dixon, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; H. E. Montgomery, Germantown, Pa.; Francis Walker, White Mountain, Alaska; Sam Brenner, Swissvale, Pa.; Robert Packard, Philadelphia, Pa.; George Rea, Bloomfield, N. J.; George J. Little, Pat-

erson, N. J.; T. J. Hampton, Jr., Meeker, Okla.; Francis Gott, New Harbor, Me.; Frank D. Blue, New Orleans; Frank Danby, Meriden, Conn.; Reginald J. Duran, Fort Atkinson, Wis.; H. K. Howard, Richmond Hill, N. Y.

A NUMBER of times I've been impressed by the response some of the comrades get to the questions they ask. I'm going to try it out myself.

I've had a few sailboats. I have one now, and I suspect there'll be others to come. I sold one last spring, thinking we'd go without any sailing this year and put the money into a vacation trip to the West Coast. I like that Coast, and there are a number of writers out there I want to meet. So boats were ruled firmly off this year's calendar. But I like to look at boats. And a month after selling mine I was prowling around a boatyard when a hull caught my eye. She was crying for paint and varnish, but I walked round and round her, seeing her as she'd look if she had them. The sailing lines were sweet. I poked here and there with a knife. She was sound. In the way of information, I asked about the sails. They were new. Looking at her some more, the old insidious thing happened to me that's happened to many. The dirt and the scars of her fade away, the mast fills with sails, she's a gleaming lady walking a shining sea, and, by George, there's yourself at the tiller.

Ten minutes later California had snapped back to the other side of the continent. The trip was off, but I owned a boat again.

The boat—a twenty-eight foot sloop, lead keel and centerboard—had been in the hands of a couple of college boys, and maybe there's nothing more useless. This accounted for the shape she was in and why she hadn't been sold earlier in the season.

The cabin is a little over six feet wide by a little over eight long and you can sit in it comfortably if you remove your hat. It sleeps, quite comfortably, two adults and a dog. The three of us had good cruising last summer, ten days at a time.

The dog is a Cairn terrier, docile enough on land, unaccountably savage on the water. Its greatest joy is to sit up on haunches watching the rods while any fishing is going on, and attacking every fish that comes aboard. Its second pleasure is to spot any buoy as far ahead as a binocular can find it, and bark at it until it is far astern.

From the letters we receive here, I know there are a great many hobbies among readers who, for one reason or another, must be stay-at-homes but must work out their restlessness on something. A full list would be astonishing, and all over the country these men are working during the long winter, just as I'm working on my boat when the weather permits. And planning is a good part of the pleasure. For example, many a city man lays out the plan of a farm, and decides what he'd plant where, and so on. You can do plenty of planning with a boat, and an interesting problem is how to get the most comfort and convenience out of a cabin the size of mine. It can be done to a surprising degree.

And I'm doing it. We needed more separation between the fish hooks and the cutlery, the food and the foghorn and the fire extinguisher. A couple of small lockers are to be built in, and they should be of mahogany, and that means five or six coats of varnish, sandpapered between coats. After I've built them, there's the matter of the cabin sides and the cockpit coaming; they're mahogany but painted white, and I want to put them back to the natural wood. And the gouge out of the low rail at the bow—those college boys must have stood aft and tried to spiral the anchor over the bow, and missed.

But I'll have all these jobs done by spring, and then there'll be nothing but the light work of keeping up the paint and varnish. From past experience, I've learned I'll get restless about then. I'd like to figure on a cabin enough larger so there can be a small coal stove in it, to lengthen out the sailing season.

In fact, I'm interested in a bigger boat right now.

If Phil Westhoff can write in to us from the South Seas asking how to keep beer cold without ice, and get a dozen letters telling him how, maybe the editor of this magazine can find the boat he wants by the same means. There's a chance that some reader, or his friend, has that boat right now, and is thinking about one larger.

She needn't be too close to New York, because I could sail her here in May or June as a good vacation cruise in case we don't get to California next summer either.

I'll appreciate very much any correspondence, and return all photographs.

Meanwhile, I'm not parting with the one I have now, until I have a line through the chock of the next one. I know a man whose life was ruined because he sold his boat one spring and couldn't find another to suit him until the following year.

H. B.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

FROM a harmless barrel hoop to a deadly arrowhead was a mere step for an Indian brave.

Request:—Will you please inform me when steel arrow points were used by the Indians in this region?

It has been said that they were used only in the interval between the coming of the whites with iron, and the time when the Indians could get guns. Is that true?

—Thomas P. Wilson, Secretary, Minnequa Historical Society, Pueblo, Colo.

Reply by Mr. Arthur Woodward:—Regarding your query as to the period when steel arrow points were used by the Indians of your region, I might first begin by saying that the bulk of such arrowheads were of the material used in binding kegs familiarly known as hoop iron. The period when metal arrowheads first invaded the Plains and the Rocky Mountain region is a moot question. We know that Lewis and Clark expedition carried with them sheetiron which the expedition blacksmith worked into arrowheads and tomahawk blades. This was in the 1804-06 period. After that a steady influx of trappers began, and for the next forty years they swarmed into every nook and cranny of the Trans-Mississippi west. Undoubtedly some of these men carried with them steel and arrowheads which were manufactured in Birmingham and Sheffield, England. These cities were the centers of metal goods traded to the Indians of North America by traders of all nationalities.

Until about 1820 the bulk of the Indian trade goods distributed over this continent was obtained from the European sources. Our own manufacturers had not yet begun the fabrication of such materials in sufficient quantities. Beginning in the 1820's we find various Eastern concerns in New England manufacturing all sorts of material which were carried into the Indian camps by the mountain men. However, I doubt very much whether metal arrowheads of the type familiarly seen on shafts from all parts of the Plains region were extensively traded in by these early invaders of the Indian domain.

I have mentioned the background of the European trade goods merely to point out the possibility of the introduction of such items into Indian life. Then, too, we must not forget the presence of the Mexican settlements to the South from which the stray pieces of metal work may have already found their way into the Indian camps of Southern Colorado. However, the scarcity of iron in New Mexico precluded any active trading from that direction.

I believe that the metal arrowheads of your region and the adjacent region were obtained and in use during the great period of emigration—let us say from 1848-9 to 1870. Of course, during latter years of this period, especially during the period of 1860 to 1870, the average Indian warrior and hunter was equipped with a firearm of some sort. In

some regions they obtained excellent arms from traders, and by theft. We have more available data on the Indians using iron obtained from emigrant trains and frontier blacksmith shops than we have of the actual trading of such material by the trappers. It was an easy matter to take the hoops from a water keg and either cut it with axes or chisels into the proper form and sharpen on sandstone, than it was to obtain ready made arrowheads in the trappers' rendezvous.

I have seen hundreds of these metal arrowheads, and yet I have never seen one to my knowledge which I might identify as a manufactured article obtained from white traders.

We must remember, too, although guns were obtained early in the nineteenth century, many of the warriors and hunters preferred to use the bow for surprise attacks, and also in the hunting of game. It was cheaper and more easily obtained. Kit Karson himself remarked that he never knew how efficient the bow really was until he had heard arrows sing past his head.

Army surgeons of the late 'sixties issued various circulars of information on the treatment of arrow wounds. Going over these records you will find that many of the arrowheads mentioned were of metal. The metal arrowheads penetrated the bone more cleanly and with less splintering than the bullet or bayonet. I have read accounts during the late 1860's of Indians along the Colorado river stealing water kegs from the mining companies for the sake of the iron hoops. Thus, it would seem to me we might safely say that our Indians who use metal arrow points made more of a practise of fashioning such types of arrowheads after they received guns than before—that is to say, in that period I have already mentioned, 1848 to 1870.

RHODESIA has its Everglades—only worse.

Request:—For many years I have been trying to find information on the swamps of Northern Rhodesia.

Are there such swamps? Have they been thoroughly explored?

Do you know anything of giant lizards living in these swamps?

—Jack L. Murray, Compton, Calif.

Reply by Captain F. J. Franklin:—There are many swamps in Northern Rhodesia, all of which have been now pretty well covered by explorers. Bechuanaland, however, possesses the real swamps. One hundred miles west of Victoria Falls we have the Chobe Swamp continually fed by underground drainage from the Zambezi river. South of Chobe there is a huge swamp one hundred miles or more long and seventy wide, to which little attention has been given by explorers. South of Chobe are the marshes of Okovanggo, and near Chobe are two huge salt pans, the Ntwe Ntwe and the Makalakari. These swamps are so forbidding there is nothing to be gained by exploring them. Bad malaria country and impossible to penetrate much.

At one time when I was collecting wild animals in Rhodesia for a menagerie I heard tales of a giant lizard. I afterwards met Hagenbeck's buyer who told me the story was a myth. Personally, I suffered so badly from malaria in South Africa I had to keep out of the swamps. I am no authority, on them, but from what hunters have told me, am sure there are no giant lizards in them.

Am wondering why you have taken an interest in these swamps? You know South Africa is full of underground rivers which feed them. The huge salt pans, now dry, so common through the whole of Africa were formerly swamps. They put down a drill in one arid spot in Cape Colony and a live fish came up the pipe with the water.

THE miniature arrowhead, in fiery hearted agate, for a lavaliere.

Request:—My fingers have always itched to saw and polish stuff like agate, quartz, etc., but all I have so far is merely the hankering. Never have found any literature on the subject, though I suppose there must be some sort of a trade journal published for lapidaries.

Some time ago I saw a tiny Indian arrowhead, somewhat under an inch long, and unless my eyes deceived me, made of fire opal. The fellow it belongs to got it from some dealer for sixty cents. I would like to get hold of a dozen or so of these in two sizes, drill a hole through the shank of each, put a gold link through these drilled holes, and attach them to a plain neck chain to make a necklace for the lady friend. It seems to me the job would look pretty grand.

Do you have any information as to whether these opal gem points are made today, or are they antique?

What sort of a drill would one need, used in a power driven lathe, to drill a hole through opal or flint? What sort of a tip and what sort of cutting oil, if any? Where could I get the drill, how much would it cost?

In case of agates, I have always understood

that the bright colors one sees in polished specimens were gotten by soaking the stone in a dye solution, certain layers being porous and letting the dye enter. Any information as to what dyes are used, strength of solution, and so forth will be appreciated.

What sort of a saw is needed to cut agate and quartz?

Is there any literature you can refer me to on these subjects? Names and addresses of manufacturers of tools for this sort of work?

I have always wanted to saw up some of the large granite cobble stones that are abundant here into cubes and polish the faces —if I can get hold of the apparatus and it does not cost too much.

—Floyd D. Palmer, Earlville, New York.

Reply by Mr. Frank J. Esterlin:—I receive many inquiries from fellows whose fingers itch to polish stones; it is a fascinating art and not difficult except in the work of cutting the finer gems in faceted form. However it is a process too involved to be treated properly in a letter, and I regret to say that I know of no books on the subject.

Carborundum wheels of various grits are used in the roughing out and shaping the stones and felt wheels with oxide of tin for the polishing. These revolve at about nine hundred R.P.M. and must be kept wet while being used.

The saw is simply a disc of twenty gauge soft sheet iron about ten inches in diameter, mounted on the shaft of an ordinary grinder head. The speed is six hundred R.P.M. Any tinsmith can make one for you but it should be turned to run true. There are no teeth to the saw. Get some number two hundred twenty carborundum powder, mix with water to form a paste. Feed this to the edge of the saw with small brush. The saw should run toward you. Make a platform for the stone to rest on. The platform should be level and of the same height as the arbor on which the saw runs. There is a pan under the saw to hold the carborundum paste and a hood over all to prevent splashing.

Hold the stone in the left hand while it rests on the platform and bring the stone in contact with the edge of the saw while you feed the carborundum paste. A little practice and you will get the hang of it. First practice on pieces of glass or porcelain.

The Indians of the Western states still make arrowheads of flint and obsidian. Some obsidian, which is volcanic glass, is quite red in color and resembles opal. Opal itself is too valuable to use for this purpose.

I think "Ward—Mineral dealer" of Rochester, N. Y., would have these in stock.

For drilling small holes in thin pieces of stone I'd suggest a diamond drill such as opticians use in drilling lenses. Any optical supply house can furnish them—probably cost around three or four dollars. Use a light oil such as Three-in-One.

Most all of the highly colored agates were originally grayish in color with rather indistinct lines through the material, and found in South America. By a secret German process, these agates are colored, hence their beauty. Black onyx and sardonyx are really gray agate artificially colored.

However no agates found elsewhere can compare in beauty of marking with those found in Montana and Oregon. The colors are natural and often show beautiful scenic effects, as well as trees, ferns, etc. I have a fine collection of these which I cut myself.

You should have no difficulty in sawing the cubes you describe. Square them up on the carborundum wheel, polish with felt and tin oxide.

Good luck to you.

GILD one nickel, and you have a five spot.

Request:—I have two American coins in good condition. Can you advise me of their value?

The first coin is dated 1883. It is identical to an American large nickel. On one side there is the Liberty head. On the other side there is the Roman Numeral five. It has a milled edge. Also the whole coin is a brassy gold color. In spots the gold color is wearing off to leave a color similar to silver, or steel.

The second coin is dated 1859. It is a one cent piece with an Indian's head with Liberty stamped in the headdress on one side. On the other side there is a circular wreath of leaves with ONE CENT stamped in the center of the wreath. The coin is thicker than an ordinary cent being about the same thickness as a large nickel. The color is lighter than an ordinary cent being of a silvery copper color. It has a smooth edge.

—Albert Sharland, Toronto, Can.

Reply by Mr. Howland Wood:—Your five cent coin of 1883, although not rare, has an interesting history. This was the first year of the new type for the nickel five cent piece. Through some error the word "cents" did not appear on the coin. Some clever people, as

soon as they were issued, thought by reeding the edges and gilding them, they could pass them for $5.00 gold pieces before the public realized what they really were. A large number of these were so treated.

The government then changed the die by putting the word "cents" where *E Pluribus Unum* was. You have evidently one of these pieces.

Your other piece was one of the first styles of the small sized cent. They were formerly made of copper and the cent that you have is a composition of copper with a little nickel, making it whitish in appearance. They issued these composition pieces until 1864 when they adopted bronze as the metal. Your piece at the most is worth only a few cents.

NO back breaking in placer mining by suction pump.

Request:—I've long been interested in one phase of placer mining on which I would like your opinion. It is the idea of using a diver and a suction hose, working on the bottom of streams. I can't seem to find much record of such outfits and I've also been told that gold is difficult to pick up in that manner.

Don't you think with sufficient suction, the gold could be picked up with the gravel. It seems to me there must be considerable gold in the bottoms of some of our gold-bearing rivers and that such an outfit would work to good advantage.

Any information you can give me on the subject will be gratefully received.

—Julian C. Donley, Sacramento, Calif.

Reply by Mr. Victor Shaw:—Your idea of using the suction-hose-and-diver form of dredge is well known among mining men, especially, of course, placer miners. It was first tried out, and its efficiency proved, in a large pool in the Feather River north of you, quite a few years ago. This pool had a very swift current, and the ordinary dredge failed to work. But, so far as picking up gold bullion from a river bedrock is concerned, instead of being "difficult" as you say, it is perhaps one of the best methods in use for conditions adapted to its operation.

Briefly, it consists of a five-inch suction pump and flexible hose of same diameter and equipped with a special nozzle designed for this type of work (to eliminate larger stones); this with a small air compressor to furnish air for diver, and a small gas engine, also an ordinary sluice system, are all mounted on a scow measuring about 30 feet by 18 feet by 4 feet. Stout wire cables attached to trees or "dead-men" on both shores anchor it securely in mid-river. The sluice is equipped with steel-shod riffles, or steel bars are laid upon the riffles (and set closely) to protect them from larger stones washed through.

The plant is operated by three men, viz: the diver, and two men on the hull—one to operate the 4-cycle-engine power plant and sluice and pump, the other to run the compressor and diver's air line. The main shaft of engine (gas engine) has a worm gear and friction clutch attached, with a sheave wheel and cable, to drag off large boulders on bottom when diver ties onto them. This works over the stern. The hose is held out over the bow-end of hull by a stiff-leg derrick so diver can handle with ease. Diver works continuously up to 40 feet of water depth, in two hour periods with short breathing spells between. The pump has a powerful suction taking up everything on bottom, and cleaning out crevices and seams on bedrock, the hose carries up four-inch stones okay, and discharging in head end of sluice. Sluice operated in usual manner as for shore work. Plant cost about $40 to $50 a day to run, handles around three hundred cubic yards of average gravel per day, of eight hours. Can even clean up gravel banks running for a long distance into either bank, if bedrock grade permits floating hull.

Cost has been around $1500 to $2000 for hull and machinery, and a diving rig can be bought for about $300. You can obtain information about this plant of the Yuba Manufacturing Co., 351 California St., San Francisco. The gas engine and pump have been supplied by another San Francisco engineering firm, but the Yuba people can direct you there, if they do not now furnish the entire plant. This is one of the cheapest, handiest and easiest operated placer plants for such work on record. Anyone with few days practise can work in a diving suit at such shallow depth. I've recommended use of such a plant in many different placer areas including Panama and some Central American districts, always with success. One outfit planned to use one by my suggestion, on placer ground inland from the Okhotsk Sea on the coast of northeastern Siberia, but I haven't heard how they managed. That region has been overrun by rather wild natives.

Get in touch with the Yuba Manufacturing Co., and they'll furnish blueprints, costs, and no doubt some valuable advice as well.

Hope this may prove an aid in whatever you're planning.

THE Custer fight is fought again.

Request:—What kind of rifles, revolvers, ammunition was serviced to the troops engaged in the battle of the "Little Big Horn" June 25th, 1876, in Montana Territory?

And is it a fact that the Indians had superior rifles and pistols?

As you are aware, there have been many stories told about this battle and there are many things that enter into the *res gestae* of this affair; there was no trial to determine the culpability or otherwise of Lt. Col. Custer; but from investigation there springs a doubt that quickens into belief that the real facts of this battle have not been published.

—Charles Chester Clark, Los Angeles, Calif.

Reply by Ol' Man Wiggins:—The regulation arms for the cavalry at the period of the Custer fight were the .45-70 Springfield singleshot carbine, and the .45 single action Colt Frontier or Single Action Army revolver. To make matters perfectly correct the Frontier revolver was the .44-40, as so marked by the makers, and the .45 was the Army or Peacemaker model.

The Indians had, in most cases, Henry, Winchester, or some other repeating rifles, so we can consider them better armed for fast, close fighting than were the troopers. The Springfield carbines of that period gave trouble from poor extraction of fired cases, and the Sioux later told of finding many carbines on the field, with empty cases in the chambers stuck too tight to be removed.

I have read everything I could find on the affair, and talked with one ex-trooper, who served in the Seventh Cavalry after the Spanish War, and who had discussed the matter with one or two oldtimers who had been in the outfit since the Indian Wars, and were with Reno on the hills. They seemed to believe that Custer jumped in to risk all, career and life, on the chance of winning the fight.

I know of no inquiry of Custer's conduct, although there was some sort of investigation of Major Reno, from what I have heard. He was cleared, I understand. Had he gone to the aid of Custer, he would not have arrived until it was all over.

As to the attitude of Army officers in this matter—you know, if you have been a soldier, that whatever their personal opinion of another officer's official conduct, it isn't aired to his disadvantage to the outside world. Some of my officers didn't think much of some of the rest of the commissioned personnel, but you may depend upon it, we buck privates and non-coms heard nothing of it.

By the way, do you know that perhaps the greatest living authority on this campaign is a resident of your city? He is Mr. E. A. Brininsstool. I'd advise that you get in touch with him, and I feel sure you will be well repaid for the effort.

THE marathon running Indians of South America carried fresh fish to Inca tables.

Request:—Do you have any information on a tribe of Indians in Bolivia or Colombia that are very long distance runners?

—A. J. Wilson, Sergeant Bluff, Ia.

Reply by Mr. Edgar Young:—Some of the highland Indians of Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia, are descendents of extremely fast endurance runners from the old Inca days, and now and then one is found who can carry on the old tradition in good shape.

Several years ago the mail was carried from Quito, Ecuador, across the Andes by runners who made the trip at high speed across the passes each day.

There were other carrier Indians who would carry a grown man at a trot all day in a back-chair. Much of the freight was carried across by Indians. The man's woman ran along with him and carried chicha and water for him to drink.

There is no particular tribe of these people; they are mainly Quechuans and Aymaras, descendents from the subjects of the Incas. At the time of the conquest, there were trained relay and long-distance runners who made the trip from the Pacific to Cuzco each morning with fresh fish for the Incas' table.

Most of the highland Indians use cocaine leaves (coca) to give them stamina for the long grinds.

I also know of ambling and trotting Indians in Guatemala who can knock out eighty miles a day with ease. They travel a peculiar gait which eats up the distance and also carry heavy loads. These are down beyond the end of the old Pan-American railroad which leaves the Tehuantepec National at Gamboa and goes to a river which is the boundary with Guatemala. The South American Indians are a higher grade of runners than these. There is a story in Ecuador of an Indian who ran from Quito to Guayaquil along the railroad in a day in 1912.

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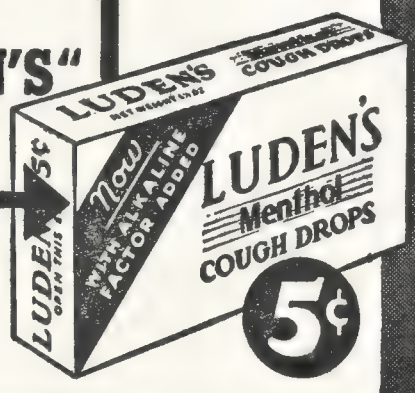

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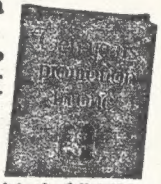

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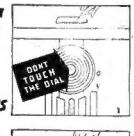

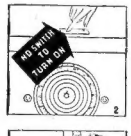

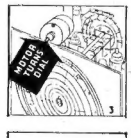

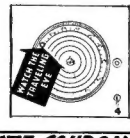

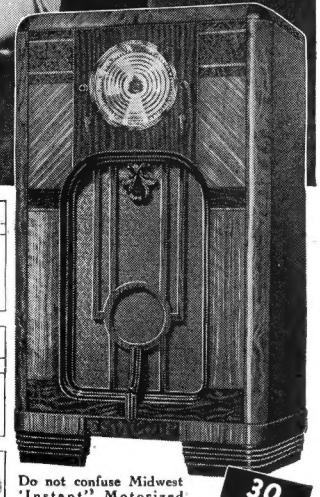

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